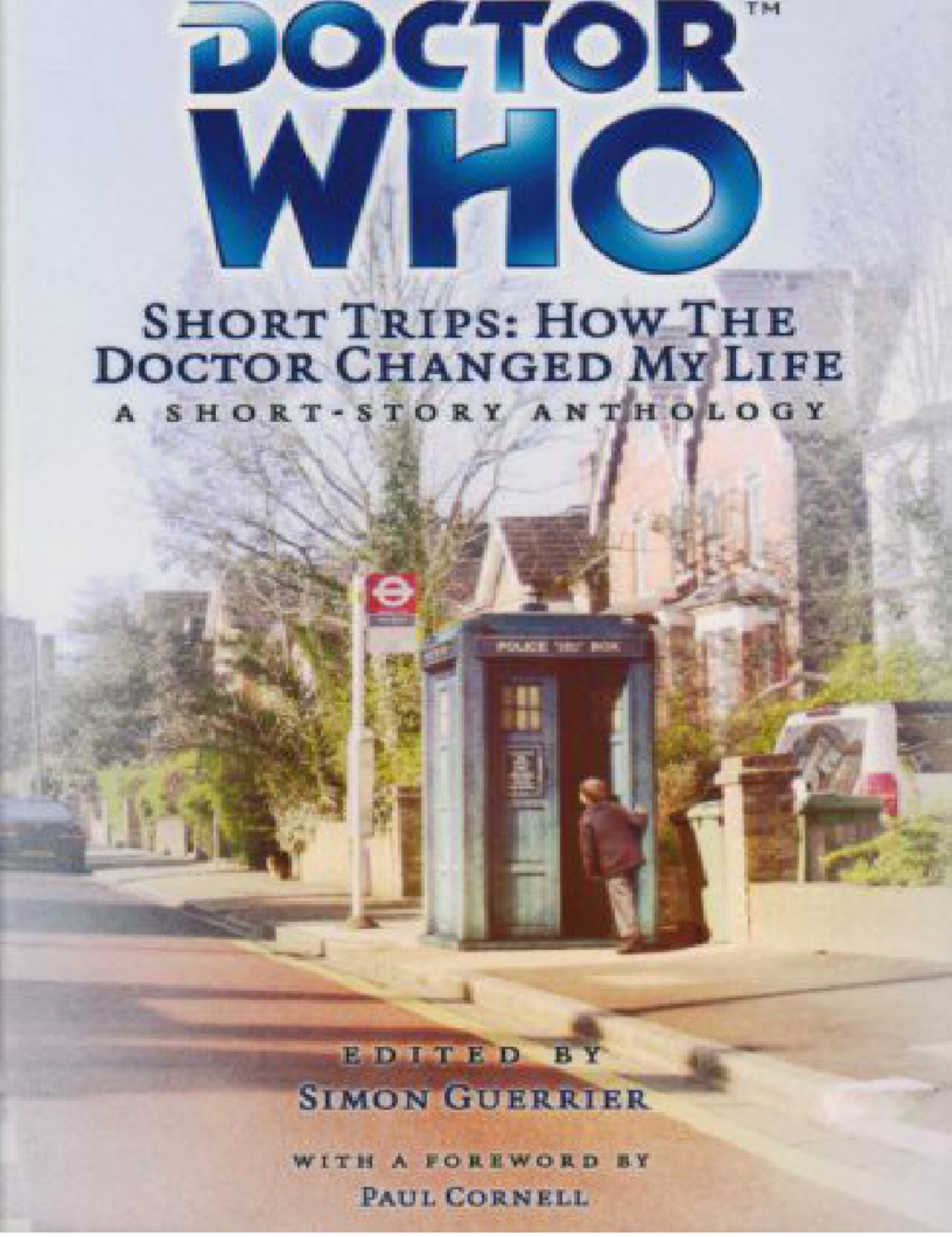
DOCTOR WHO™

SHORT TRIPS: HOW THE DOCTOR CHANGED MY LIFE

A SHORT-STORY ANTHOLOGY



EDITED BY

SIMON GUERRIER

WITH A FOREWORD BY

PAUL CORNELL

DOCTOR WHO™

BIG FINISH

SHORT TRIPS:

How THE DOCTOR

CHANGED MY LIFE

A Short-Story Anthology

Edited by Simon Guerrier

Published by Big Finish Productions Ltd

PO Box 1 1 2 7 , Maidenhead, SL6 3LW

www.bigfinish.com

Range Editor: Xanna Eve Chown

Managing Editor: J a s o n Haigh-Ellery

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ISBN: 9 7 8 - 1 - 8 4 4 3 5 - 3 4 1 - 5

Cover art by Alex Mallinson 2008

Model: Cameron Shaw

Original sleeve design by Clayton Hickman

First published S e p t e m b e r 2008

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Homework © Michael Coen

(First published in Short Trips: Defining Patterns)

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With thanks to John Binns, Ian Farrington, Rob Francis,

Matthew G r i f f i t h s , Gary Russell and Jim Sangster

Typeset in Quadraat

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How the Doctor

Changed My Life

Foreword by Paul Cornell

I'm very proud to introduce a collection of Doctor Who stories entirely by

those new to professional fiction. Big Finish's track record in this regard

is exemplary: Joe Lidster, Mark Wright, Cavan Scott, Simon Guerrier,

Eddie Robson and Nick Wallace all sold their first fiction via the company.

The Bernice Summerfield line has made a point of running a contest for

amateur writers for many years. It was Simon's idea to extend this to the

Doctor Who line. The work he's put in shouldn't be underestimated: the

response was enormous. The 'slush pile' of Doctor Who fan writing talent

has been thoroughly investigated once more, as it was in the days of those

other great generators of new writers, the Virgin and BBC lines of Doctor

Who novels. This time, there's enough of quality to fill a whole anthology.

The fandom is justifiably renowned for its creativity.

So, what's the future for the authors in these pages?

One or two of them may regard this as the moment they kicked *the* door

of professionalism open. They will send a copy of this book to Russell

T Davies or Steven Moffat, demanding a place on *the* next television

season. I'd like to say we'll never hear from them again, but that's

never

the case. We'll hear from them too much, complaining that their talent

hasn't been recognised.

A number of the writers in these pages will be satisfied with having got

this far. They'll show this book to their family and friends, go back to their

regular jobs, and enjoy placing the odd story here and there, professionally

or not, their whole lives. Great stuff. How good it is to be satisfied and

know how far you wanted to go. It's a moment of fun and satisfaction for

people doing good stuff in other fields. Congratulations. Nobody can take

this moment from you.

And then there are the unhappy ones. They'll be astonished to feel this

book in their hands. Impatient to open the cover and see their name. Yes,

there it is. They spelt it right. And there's the story title next to it. They'll flip

through the pages and find the story. There's that name again! They may

well read it. And they'll even enjoy it, because having it on pages, in print

like this, makes it feel like it's someone else's. Like it's... someone else's.

And having it in a book... well, it doesn't quite feel like they thought having

it in a book would feel. It was meant to be a tremendous moment, a life-

changing moment, the moment they kicked the door of professionalism

open. But instead... it's just having a story in a book. Slip the cover off,

smell it, definitely smell those pages, ahh, solidness, booky bookness!

But, after all that, just a book. And when they read it, didn't, actually, some

of the prose seem a bit clunky? Actually, this is terrible, here it is in a book,

and there's nothing transcendent about the experience at all, and really,

all they've found here is that they should have done another draft! This

doesn't feel like the completion of anything, it feels like - like -

Like the start.

The unhappy ones are the authors to watch. Because that endless search

for the moment not of publication but of Publication, damn it, will take

them far. They don't deserve anything. They will make themselves work

for everything. Watch one of them start watching a TV series, start writing

spec scripts for it, start doing all the hard work that needs to be done that

will, in years, in long, long years, get them onto working for the television

series of Doctor Who.

One of them will get there.

But don't imagine it'll make them happy.

Paul Cornell is the Hugo Award-nominated writer of the Doctor Who

episodes 'Father's Day', 'Human Nature' and 'The Family of Blood'. His

novels Something More and British Summertime are published by Gollancz

and he's currently writing Captain Britain for Marvel Comics.

Editor's note

This anthology comprises 25 stories originally entered into a Big Finish

competition for new writers in January 2007. All 25 authors have, working

with the editor, revised their stories since the competition.

The overall winner of the competition, Michael Coen's 'Homework', was

originally published in Short Trips: Defining Patterns. It is reprinted here, with

the 24 runners up, for the sake of completeness.

Homework

Michael Coen

An adventure of the Second Doctor, with Jamie and Zoe

What I Did On My Summer Holidays By Norman Bean (Age n)

This summer I had the most absolutely increddible incredible adventure of

my life which I will now tell you about.

One evening I WENT to my bedroom. I am usually SENT to my bedroom

at night but I had been out playing football all day with my new Kevin

Keegan football boots and I was quite tired, so I actually said 'Mum, I'm

going to bed,' and she said 'Okay, see you tomorrow,' and I went to my

room to read my Roy of the Rovers comic which isn't as good as it used to be

since Roy got married (which makes it quite boring).

Norman, this sentence is too long. Split it into shorter sentences.

I was reading my comic when SUDDENLY a strange man appeared beside

my bed. I could see him but I could also see through him, like a ghost. He

didn't say anything, just stood there staring. I was really scared and ran

downstairs to get my Mum. She came back up to my room with me but

when we got to my bedroom he was gone. So, of course, Mum thought

I was making it up and told me to stop being a baby (even though I was

NOT crying).

My mum went back downstairs and, after a few minutes, the man

appeared again. This time I noticed that he looked a bit like my Dad, only

Dad wasn't in *the* house, he was working night shift. I said 'Who are you?'

He laffed laughed and said 'I am you. I am what you will become when you

grow up, 30 years from now in the year 2008!!!!!!'

I was sure he was making it up because he didn't look like a man from the

future. He DID look a bit like my Dad but he was fatter and very scruffy, not

at all like men from *the* future. He didn't have a spacesuit on or anything

like that, just a T-shirt that said Duffy the Vampire or something.

Norman, you haven't listened properly to the assignment. You *were asked to* write about something that actually happened to you during the summer holidays. This is

not a creative writing exercise.

The man knew about all sorts of things that nobody else knows about, like

where I hide my collection of football cards and private things like that, so

I started to believe him. He told me how I could make myself very rich in

the future by buying toys and not opening them and putting them in *the*

cupboard and not playing with them. I told him that I didn't think that it

sounded like a very good idea but he told me it was. I said to him that I

didn't have enough pocket money to buy lots of toys, only enough for my

Roy *of the Rovers* comic and for some football cards and anyway I don't really

play with toys much any more because they're for kids. He told me he knew

of a way I could get lots of money to buy toys but before he could tell me

he started to fade away. That's when I knew he must be from the future,

like on Star Trek or something, because they can teleport. Anyway, I was

going to run downstairs and tell my mum all about this but then I thought

about it and I decided that she probably STILL wouldn't believe me. So I

didn't tell anyone.

The next day as I was going to the park to play football (as usual!) when

a strange man stopped to talk to me. He said he was a doctor and offered

me some jelly babies. They looked as if they had been in his pocket for a

looooooooong time. I didn't take any because you shouldn't take sweets

from strangers and anyway he didn't look like a doctor. He was dressed

like a tramp with a big furry coat tied at the waist with a bit of string and

his hair was like the haircuts the Beatles used to have, not like a doctor's

hair at all.

He asked me if anything strange had happened to me recently and if I

had seen anything unusual like a ghost. Now, even though I had seen these

things I decided not to tell him because you should never talk to strange

men and then he tried to grab my arm so I kicked him on the shin and ran

away.

Norman, you *did the* right thing. *If you ever see* this man again you must run away *from him and tell* your parents or another adult right *away*.

When I got to the flat bit of the park where we play football I told my friends

about the (pretend!) doctor. Billy Stewart didn't believe me and called me a

liar, but the others believed me. We went to find *the* park keeper, but when

he took us back to look for the strange man we couldn't find him. Billy

Stewart called me a liar again and I got into a fight with him and I would

have beaten him only he tripped me up. I just went home after that.

I was a bit scared because I couldn't understand how the doctor who

looked like a tramp could have known about the man from the future. I

was even more scared when the ghostly man appeared in my room again

that evening. He told me all about the toys I should buy but I didn't really

understand because he said the toys were from films and when I said 'I

haven't seen that film,' he would say That's 'cos it hasn't been made

yet.'

'Anyway,' I said to him 'I told you I don't have money to buy lots of toys

just to put them in my cupboard and not play with them.' And he said

he knew where I could get money. He told me that my Nan had LOTS of

money hidden in a jar right at the back of one of the cupboards in her

kitchen and she was old and had forgotten about it and she wouldn't even

spend it before she dies - WHICH WOULD BE NEXT WEEK!!!

I told the ghost that he was a liar and that my Nan was not going to die,

but he said he was from the future and he knew about these things. He

said that after she died my Dad would find the money when he cleaned

her house but if I took the money from my Nan's before she died then no

one would know. My Nan wouldn't even notice it was missing and I could

keep all of it.

I told him that stealing was wrong and to stop coming to my bedroom

and telling me these things. The man started to fade away again but, as he

was fading, he shouted 'Remember what I said,' but because he was fading

it wasn't very loud and my mum didn't hear him.

Next morning when I woke up I decided to go to visit my Nan. I was

NOT going to steal her money but I thought if I looked at the back of

the

cupboard in the kitchen and found the jar with the money in it then I would

know if he was really from the future or not.

I'm *glad you* k now that it is wrong to steal Norman but I'm afraid I find this story quite distasteful. I'm going to have to send *a* letter home to your mother!

When I got to my Nan's house a very beautiful lady was sitting outside on

the step. She was wearing a suit that looked like it was made out of silver

foil and she had a friendly smile. 'Hello. My name is Zoe,' she said, and I

said 'Hello'. 'Have you come to see your Nan?' she asked and I said that I

had.

She asked me if I loved my Nan and I said 'YES'. And then she asked me

if I would do anything that would hurt her and I said 'NO'. And then she

asked if I would do something that would hurt my Nan even if my Nan

didn't know about it and even if no one else knew about it. I thought for

a minute and told her that I guess that would be wrong, even if my Nan

didn't know about it and even if no one ever found out. 'That's right' said

the lady. 'Now go in and visit your Nan, she'll be glad to see you.'

The lady walked away from my Nan's house and walked over to a man

who was wearing a KILT (that's right - a Scotch man like Hot Shot Hamish

in the Scorcher comic). Then they both waved at me and walked away. I

waved back and went in to see my Nan.

My Nan was very old but she would always have some sweets for me and

she would give me some pocket money when I went to see her. Sometimes

she would tell me funny stories about when my Dad and Uncle Jim were

young and the stupid things that they used to do, and that would make me

laugh. My Nan was really great and I'm sad now that I can't see her any

more.

That night the man came to see me again. He asked if I had got the

money and I said 'NO. I won't do it.' He asked me why not and I told him

that I loved my Nan and it was wrong and anyway I didn't want lots of toys

that you never played with and they were for babies anyway.

He got really angry and started to shout at me. He said I was stupid

and this was HIS big chance to make some money. As he got louder and

louder he seemed to become more and more solid until I couldn't see

through him any more. He was swinging his arms around and one of them

knocked over the cup on my shelf that we won at the end of last year for

the District Under-12s Football Championship. He looked at it and started

to *laff laugh.* He was standing right in front of me now and I was getting

very, very scared.

'I'm here!' he shouted. 'I can travel back and forth!' He looked at me

with a really mean look on his face. 'I don't need you,' he said. 'I can do it

all by myself.' He pushed passed me and pulled open my bedroom door.

But he couldn't go into the hall because blocking his way were the doctor

who looked like a tramp, the beautiful lady called Zoe and the Scotch

man!!!!!!!!

Tour game is up' said the doctor. ' I've closed the time-rift you found

and you are going on a one-way trip back to 2008.' They pushed the man

back into my room and the Scotch man held him while the doctor shouted

at him.

'But really, is this the best you could do?' said the doctor. 'You have

the opportunity to travel back to the past and your tiny imagination only

stretches far enough to try to terrify this poor boy into buying some useless

trinkets!'

'Jamie,' the doctor said to the Scotch man. 'Take him to the Tarvest'.

With that, the Scotch man in the kilt took Mr Smelly out of my room and

downstairs.

Then the beautiful lady called Zoe turned to me and told me that I was a

good boy and that I obviously knew what things were important. And then

she crouched down and whispered in my ear. 'You won't ever forget what's

important, will you Norman? Promise me.' I promised her I wouldn't.

Then the man who said he was a doctor said 'Come on, Zoe. We have

to go.'

I watched them from the top of the stairs as they went down. My Mum

was standing by *the* front door, really still, like a statue. When *the* doctor passed her he waved his hand in front of her and she opened the door for

them and then closed it behind them.

I ran downstairs to my Mum and gave her a big hug and started to tell

her everything that had happened BUT SHE STILL DIDN'T BELIEVE ME.

I said 'But you saw the doctor and Zoe leaving the house.' But she said 'It

was just a salesman at the door. I sent him packing.' I don't know why she

couldn't remember them. I think perhaps the doctor hypnotised her or

used some mind control or something.

Anyway I kept telling her about everything that had happened but when

I got to the bit about Nan dying she started to cry and told me to be quiet.

Then she said I was a nasty boy for making up such hurtful stories.

She

told me not to tell my Dad because he would get very angry. Then she sent

me to my room.

I was very angry in my room because no one WOULD BELIEVE ME. I

decided I was never, ever going to tell my family or my friends any of my

secrets ever again. Never ever.

Two weeks later, on a Saturday morning, Mum took me to see my Nan

but my Mum couldn't wake her up because she had died. My mum said

she had just slipped away in her sleep. I had to go to the funeral and get a

new black coat for it.

After the funeral my Mum said I should never, ever tell my Dad about the

dream I had. I told her it wasn't a dream but she still WON'T BELIEVE ME.

I'm sorry, Norman. I didn't realise that your grandmother had died during the

holidays. I'm not angry with you but I think *I* will still *write* to your mother to *arrange a little chat with* her.

I think about what happened quite a lot now and don't really go out to

play football so much any more. Instead I go to the library quite a lot and

get out books about spacemen and the future and things like that. That's

what I like now.

I also think quite a lot about what the lady called Zoe said. Even

though

I said I understood what she meant I get confused when I think about it.

I think she might have meant about how my Nan was important and stuff

like that. But my Nan's gone now so I'm not really sure.

I think that the lady might have been from the future because she had a

very shiny suit, so maybe when I get older (in the FUTURE!) I'll understand

what she meant. Maybe in the future I'll understand what's important.

Change Management

Simon Moore

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Mel

Pip Hexiflorn sat at his lonely desk in Cage Control B on FluxiCon IV,

staring at the company mission statement above his terminal.

Flux Control makes the universe a more pleasant place for you, it said. We control

harmful elements to *preserve* your galactic heritage.

Sometimes, to remind himself of the depressing reality, Pip wrote his

own version of the mission statement. These versions were different in

that they gave some indication of what the company actually did. His latest

read like this: Hi there! Here at Flux Control *we feed poor people to a* Flux Beast to keep *it from* eating super-rich planets! Larks!

If Pip had been aware of what the company did at the outset, he wouldn't

have taken the job. Like most people in the galaxy, Pip had thought of

Flux Control as just the big company that did all the heritage work out

in the furthest spiral arm, preserving the tourist zone. If anything, they

were quite popular; lots of the systems did very well out of passing tourist

trade. There were mutterings among some activists about Flux Control's

environmental impact, but then you could always find something bad if

you turned over every stone. Certainly the whining of a few activists wasn't

enough to make him turn down the job. But he had been horrified

when he

got to his induction session on FluxiCon IV and the Boo'in manager talked

the group through the station's true purpose. Fair enough, it would be bad

for the economy if the Flux Beast was allowed to devour the tourist worlds,

but there must be a better way of containing the Beast than trapping it in

space and feeding it lots of poor people. Pip had been going to complain,

but when *the* guy sitting next to him got vaporised while raising similar

concerns, he decided to keep his head down. He would definitely do

something about it if he ever got into management.

The trouble was that three years later he was still sitting at the same

desk, and he was still keeping his head down. Pip often told his colleague

Stella about his plans to do something to bring the company down

from the inside, but he was beginning to wonder if that was all talk. He

genuinely wanted to make a difference, but he just couldn't figure out what

a Gubaban in a middle-ranking IT position could do. He could change his

team's duty rota, yes, he could change it to spell out a rude acrostic, but

that would hardly bring down his Boo'in masters, nor save his team from

their horrific shifts at the screaming tubes. If he was a Boo'in

something

might be possible, but as a Gubaban he would be vaporised if he so much

as chanted a political slogan under his breath.

There was a deep gurgle somewhere within the FluxiCon, and the entire

station gave a lurch. That often happened at feeding time, but the feed

wasn't due for half an hour.

He spun away from the mission statement and drifted his chair towards

his bank of monitors. Screen one played out the scene on the screaming

tube deck. In a past life, before Flux Control took over the place, the tubes

had been used to launch probes into an experimental void in the centre of

the station. Nowadays, they were used to launch people into the jaws of the

Flux Beast. The FluxiCon staff and Boo'in guards were lining up today's

meal in front of the gaping entrances to the tubes. Balabang, one of Pip's

team, was trying to fight the Boo'in guarding his section. The madman

had been doing this every day for two years. The guards had come to treat it

as a jokey routine, prodding him with the butts of their vaporisation sticks.

Perhaps it was part of the routine for Balabang too, but at least it offered

some balance against the terrible tasks he was forced to perform. The

rest

of the FluxiCon workers had given up resisting long ago; nowadays people

like Pip just tried not to think about the job at hand, or hear the screams as

they sealed the tube doors.

Screen two showed the Flux itself, caged inside the old void. Sometimes

it got excited just before the feed and tried to burst out of its cage. Today it

was calm, a slow swirl of eye-popping colours. If he hadn't seen it devour

so many innocent people he might have watched its shifting surface for

hours.

It was daytime TV on screen three. You only got reruns on FluxiCon

IV, but this one was a classic. It had been played so often the colour had

bleached out of the file, the one where Callum Barrarat finally declares

his love to Lucie Voltron. Pip had never been one for the soaps back on

Gubaba, but after three years on the FluxiCon Lucie and Callum and

their glittering dream world felt like old friends. It was good to escape

sometimes.

Towards the end of the episode there was a knock on the door of Cage

Control. Pip glanced at the TV; it was the famous scene where Callum

watches Lucie walking hand in hand down the beach with her fiance.

Callum's face shows that he's finally realised that it's now or never. It will

be too late tomorrow; Lucie's getting married in the morning...

Pip stood up. Perhaps Stella had managed to escape the screaming tube

deck for the day and had come for a cup of tea; she hadn't done that in a

while. Pausing only to scrape together some of the papers on his desk and

smooth down his hair, he unlocked the door. An image flashed in his mind

- Stella, framed in the doorway, wearing the grey overalls she wore so well.

Him, finally daring to kiss her hand. 'I've finally brought them down,'

he could tell her. 'I've finally changed... something.' Dew-drop tears of

passion would bud on Stella's delicate eyelashes, and - well, maybe one

day.

Besides, as the door slid open it was clear that it wasn't Stella. You got

very accustomed to grey as a FluxiCon worker. The two main sources of

colour were the Flux Beast and the people you fed to the Flux Beast, so you

tended to focus on the grey of the floors instead. Unfamiliar colour signals

were bombarding Pip's retinas, and it took his brain quite a while to sort

them into the shape of a man in a very, *very* colourful coat.

'Hello,' said the man. 'Is this Cage Control?'

Pip nodded silently. He didn't know who this person was, nor where he

fitted into the management hierarchy. Could it be possible that he didn't

even work for the company? Pip was filled with sudden fear.

'Excellent,' said the man and, before Pip could respond, strode right

past him. A red-headed girl in an all-pink ensemble swiftly followed, her

arms a tangle of wires and technical bits.

She piled *the* technology by one of the locking units and started trying

to connect her archaic looking kit. Pip blinked at her, completely at a loss

as to what to do.

'Excuse me, I don't think you can come in here,' he said eventually.

'Can't?' said the man. 'Of course we can.'

'Shouldn't we get on with this, Doctor?' asked the girl.

'Yes, off you go, Mel. You know what to do,' he said, waving her

on. 'Unlike this young man who, it seems, has forgotten all about the

memo.'

'The memo?' said Pip.

'The memo,' said *the* man, and handed Pip a piece of paper. It said only:

MEMO

He turned the paper over. The other side was blank.

'I can't remember *ever* getting a memo,' said Pip. 'And I'm not sure if

a memo is authorisation for anything. I've worked here a long time, and

I've never seen you before so maybe you don't know how it works round

here. If the Boo'in find out that I've let you in here they might, y'know... '

He gulped. 'Vaporise me.'

'We can't have that,' said the man.

'So,' said Pip, 'I'll phone down to find out if it's all right, I'll... ' He trailed

off. The man was staring at him. 'You're not going to let me phone down,

are you?'

'Well,' said the man. 'We'd rather you didn't. You see, myself and Mel,

we're somewhat in the middle of preventing the people on *that* screen,

from being shot into *the* thing on that screen.'

'You are?' said Pip.

'I am,' said Mel, now almost entirely surrounded by wires. 'He's standing

round talking to you.'

'But that's... that's brilliant,' said Pip, hurriedly following it up with:

'Is what I might say if I wasn't entirely loyal to the management and this

wasn't a loyalty test.'

'It's not a test,' said the girl. 'Promise.'

'Honestly, it's all in the memo,' said the man. 'Why do people never read these things, Melanie? After we go to all that trouble to keep people informed. He's like one of those Boo'in at the head office, completely unable to grasp the concept of doing things a little bit differently.'

'Perhaps he's been in his job a bit too long,' she said. 'They sometimes have difficulty adjusting to changes in corporate culture.'

Pip looked at the man and the woman, working away at the locking unit.

On screen two, the screaming tubes were nearly loaded for the day. He saw poor Stella, down there after all, crying as she sealed the hatch on a group of Borgesians, a Boo'in guard looming behind her. Pip's mind started to tick over, and all of a sudden something clicked.

'Hang on,' he said, gesturing to the screen. 'You said you wanted to save those people?'

'Yes,' said the man, not turning round. His and the girl's hands were a blur of activity as they finished patching their equipment into the FluxiCon.

'But you're in the wrong place,' said Pip urgently. 'This is Cage Control, you can't access the screaming tubes from here. We've got to be quick, but I can help, I can take you where you need to be.'

The man turned round and smiled. 'Oh, no no no,' said the man. 'This

is precisely where we want to be, we know what we're doing.' He turned

to the woman. 'In your own time, Mel.'

'It should be done already,' she said.

'What's going on?' said Pip. 'What have you done?'

'This,' said the man, sweeping his arm dramatically towards the

monitors. But everything was normal. The last people had been squeezed

into the screaming tubes and the hatches locked down. It was always a

relief when the last hatch was sealed and you couldn't hear the screams

any more. On screen two the Flux Beast pulsed inside the bars of its golden

energy cage, anticipating its feed. Nothing had changed.

The man looked at his watch. 'That is, er... Mel?'

She battered on the keys of her archaic interface. 'I don't know... it

should have happened by now.'

'They're going to be jettisoned any second,' said Pip. 'You said that you

were going to save them. Please, just today, can you save them?'

The man turned to gaze at him. 'Why couldn't you?' he said.

Moments passed, Pip's insides churned over as he failed to find

something to say. There weren't any excuses. He'd brought this on

himself. The girl stood slowly and pointed to the screens. 'Look,' she said.

'It's happening.'

There was a long low groan as the FluxiCon eased itself into a new state.

Pip watched as the picture played out on screen two. The golden bars

around the Flux Beast first pulsed, and then dissolved into nothingness.

'But it will eat us all,' said Pip. 'The Beast will eat every single planet in

the galaxy. Turn *the* cage back on.'

'It's too late for that,' said the man, pushing Pip back.

'Don't worry,' said the girl. 'Watch.'

'You're killing yourselves too,' said Pip, sliding to floor. 'You're mad!' But

he couldn't help but admire their nerve.

On the screen, the Flux Beast flexed in the void, testing the limits of its

freedom. It expanded as it grew more confident, turning from its normal

oily colours to a deeper, darker, bloodier red. Soon it would realise that

it was entirely free, and after its long captivity Pip was sure it would take

pleasure in devouring them piece by piece. He'd wanted to do so much

with his life, he'd wanted to make a difference, he'd wanted to tell Stella

- what about Stella?

He'd never told her how he felt, had never quite found the right moment.

There had always been some excuse. So many excuses. And now he was

going to lose everything.

There was confusion down on the screaming tube deck. He watched as

the Boo'in lashed out at the FluxiCon workers. One of them bore down on

Balabang with the business end of his vaporisation stick. Balabang closed

his eyes as *the* weapon made contact with his skin.

Pip closed his eyes, he couldn't watch any more. The station continued to

shudder - a howl ripping through it. Was that how the Flux Beast sounded

when it was free? Pip thought of the beaches of Gubaba. Of walking hand-

in-hand with Stella as *the* tide lapped around their feet. That was it. That

was a good thought to die with. Soon the silence would overtake him, yes,

the sounds of the world he'd known were already fading away. He was

actually glad to be done with the whole disappointing business.

'Hello there,' boomed a voice all around him. For a moment Pip thought

he was being addressed by the Mystical Fisherman, come to guide him

over to the Next Lagoon. But he opened his eyes and saw the colourful

man talking into a speak-tube, his voice echoing from *the* FluxiCon info-

instructional speakers.

'My name is the Doctor,' continued the colourful man. 'I'm here to

oversee the change in management. I'm sure you got *the* memo. Guards,

I'm afraid those dreadful sticks of yours have been deactivated. I suggest

that you surrender nicely, before the workers do you any damage. Workers,

would you please let those people out of the tubes. There'll be no killing

here today, nor at any other time.'

Pip watched the Doctor struggle to find the off-switch on the speak-

tube. Once he was sure he no longer addressed the masses, he turned to

the girl.

'There Mel,' said *the* Doctor. 'Job done.'

The world suddenly seemed absurd to Pip, as confused as the Doctor's

dress sense. He looked at his monitors. Down at *the* screaming tubes,

chaos reigned. He could see Balabang, not vaporised in the slightest,

holding down a Boo'in guard. He could see Stella at *the* other side of *the*

screen, pulling open a screaming tube hatch, releasing the people trapped

inside. The scene on screen two was even more of a surprise. There was

just deep, inky void. The Flux Beast had gone.

'Where is it?' he said.

'Right Mel, back to the TARDIS,' said the Doctor, and without a word or

even a glance at Pip, they went towards the door.

'Hey,' said Pip more loudly, 'where's the Flux Beast gone?'

The girl rolled her eyes. 'We'd better tell him, Doctor.'

The man sighed, turning. 'It wasn't a beast. It was never a beast.'

'It wasn't?'

'Just change,' said the Doctor. 'Your masters wanted to preserve their

tourist planets, so they had them paralysed in time. But you can't stop the

decay, not really. The system needed to equalise somewhere. It needed

fresh blood to keep the thing going. It just wasn't a Beast so much as the

balancing of an equation.'

'So the tourist planets are doomed?' said Pip.

'Isn't everything?' said the Doctor gently.

'But only when each thing's time has come,' said Mel. 'Which in the case

of those holiday planets was a long, long time ago.'

'Change is the natural order of things,' said the Doctor. 'This galaxy's

been trading on its past for too long. It's time for something new. Look,

we really have to be off now.' And with that, they slipped around the corner

and were gone.

'But,' said Pip. 'But-'

But of course there was no one to hear. He stood there, furious with

them for not listening to him, more furious with himself. Pip looked at

the memo he still clutched in has hand. The Doctor and Mel had walked in

and overturned everything he knew in a couple of minutes, and he'd stood

back and let them because they had this scrap of useless paper. All it had

taken to change his whole world was to act as if it was allowed. What had

been stopping him all this time?

A thought struck Pip. He looked up at screen one. There was a riot going

on down there. The workers were attacking the Boo'in. The Boo'in were

beating the people emerging from the tubes. The people from the tubes

were lashing out at everyone. He couldn't tell where the riot was headed,

or who was likely to win, but he knew he had to stop it. He leapt over to

the intercom.

'This is Acting Managing Director Pip Hexiflorn speaking,' he bellowed

into the speak-tube. 'Please refrain from fighting while we make plans for

your safe return home. We apologise for your ill treatment at *the* hands of

the previous management, and hope to compensate you for any distress.'

He watched the screen.

The rioters blinked at one another, not sure what to do next. One of

them put down the truncheon he'd been wielding. Soon others followed

suit. Yes, thought Pip, they knew what he was doing. They'd all finally been

given the excuse to do things differently, to dare to do them better.

Screen three caught the corner of his eye.

The soap opera had reached that beautiful moment at the very end of *the*

episode when Callum kisses Lucie after loving her for such a long, long

time.

Pip stabbed the intercom button again.

'And could Stella please come and see me in my office immediately,' he

said.

Curiosity

Mike Am berry

An adventure of the Fifth Doctor, with Nyssa

Morning came as it always did on the SS Hermes, a slow new dawn without

a sun. The lights in the habitation cells brightened gradually until the

slumber was broken by the tinny voice of the ship's computer announcing

that it was time to be up. Ailsa's bunk light stuck and stuttered once again,

before flashing on for certain. The neon brightness made her groan and

press her knuckles to her eyes. Her daddy had said the light would be fixed

soon. but he'd been busy. Nobody listens to you much when you live on a

starship and you're eight years old.

Ailsa had spent all her life on the Hermes, but the creaking old hulk did

not feel like home. Home was where they were going. Or, it seemed to her,

home was where they had come from and would never get back to again,

Her mother had pictures of Earth, which her grandmother had left as a

young woman, and these were the images Ailsa longed to call her home,

Somewhere with blue sky, green fields and the sea.

There were no lessons today, and Ailsa planned to spend her time at the

Hydroponic Capsules helping Acting Corporal Barker with the strawberry

harvest. The berries grew fat and juicy under the heat-lamps and Barker

always let her eat a few as she picked away.

Throwing on her thick green dress and buckling the outsize belt. Ailsa

was quickly out of the habitation section, turning left past the Medilab and

climbing the creaky access ladder to Deck C before anyone else on her shift

so much as stirred. She loved her days in the Hydroponic Capsules and

some day hoped to be the Acting Corporal who tended the plants herself.

Her mother encouraged this, saying that if she followed her heart anything

was possible.

Ailsa liked the sound of achieving the impossible. In their spare

moments. Acting Corporal Barker had been teaching her all about selective

breeding and had even agreed to give her a comer of Hydroponics to do

some experiments in. It had taken several months of trying, but through

following a careful scientific process Ailsa had a crop of beans that looked

to be growing fitter and juicier than usual. She hoped they would taste

better as well.

The access lever was stiffer than usual and it took two hands to bring it

through its arc. The doors to Hydroponics grumbled open but there was...

what was that? A second noise; low, grating, somehow growing louder

until. as soon as it had become dear, it was suddenly no longer there.

Ailsa shivered and tried to convince herself it was the ageing heating ducts

beginning to warm.

'Keep us from the shadows.' The phrase came automatically, but was

always heartfelt. It was her mother's prayer of choice.

Ailsa slipped into the control module and idly checked the monitors.

The four Hydroponic Capsules were little ecosystems all of their own; the

herb and vegetable gardens, the humid fruit garden with its butterflies and

the feed garden for the animals, full of tall grasses and trays full of sweet

clover. She rarely entered the feed garden, but there was something odd

about what she saw of it on the monitor. The more she thought about it,

the more she knew what was out of place. It was that big blue box.

Curiosity rather than courage won the day. Ailsa crept through the stands

of grasses towards the box, and regarded it critically. It wasn't much of a

feed store, if that's what it was. A tool cupboard maybe?

'Where did you come from?' she asked, reaching out to touch the

cracked paint. As she did so she heard a movement and drew back quickly.

A door had opened in the side of the box and a tall man in a light-coloured

coat stepped out. In fact he almost walked right into Ailsa - it was hard to

tell who was the most surprised. The man recovered his composure.

'Oh,'he said. 'Hello.,

Ailsa drew back momentarily from the stranger. You didn't get strangers

on spaceships, only in stories from home; the scary ones Ailsa was never

meant to hear. Yet she remembered her manners.

'Hello,' she said. 'I'm Ailsa, who are you?'

'Pleased to meet you. I'm the Doctor.'

'No you're not, silly! Acting Lieutenant Morris is the doctor. He's my

uncle.'

'No, that's my name. The Doctor. And this is my friend Nyssa.'

Another stranger emerged from the box, a beautiful, curly-haired

woman who gave Ailsa a brief smile before taking in her surroundings.

Surroundings which were almost exclusively made of tall grass. Ailsa

couldn't help but stare at the woman's clothing, she had never seen

anything like it. Such delicate embroidered leaves and flowers. And that

collar looked cosy, almost like an animal's fur. There had never been

anyone dressed this finely aboard the Hermes.

These people had come from... No, it wasn't possible.

'Doctor,' said Nyssa, 'where are we?'

The Doctor did not look sure. 'Maybe our friend Ailsa can tell us?'

Ailsa was puzzled. 'You're in Hydroponic Capsule Four. Why were you

hiding in that cupboard?'

'It's not really a cupboard,' The Doctor said as he adjusted his hat. 'You

say this is a Hydroponic Capsule? Then we may be on some sort of vessel?

A spaceship? That would explain the distress signal.'

This puzzled Ailsa even more. Were they making fun of her? If they were

it wasn't fair. And what were they doing in Hydroponics anyway? She knew

someone who would give these strangers a stern talking-to.

'Would you like to speak with my dad... with my father? He's the Acting

Chief Officer.'

The Doctor considered this for a moment. 'Yes, I believe I would.'

He turned to his companion.

'We seem to have overshot somewhat. There's no emergency any more.'

He looked disappointed, as if his pudding ration had elapsed. The Doctor

noticed Ailsa watching him and broke into a slightly embarrassed grin.

'Can't be helped,' he said. 'And since we're here, we might as well look

around. Make sure everything's okay before we go.'

Nyssa wasn't so sure. 'Doctor, are you... '

'Yes, thank you Nyssa. Although I think you should remain here with the

TARDIS, until we know exactly where we've, er, ended up.'

'Well, if you think that's best.' Nyssa obviously didn't share the Doctor's

confidence.

Fifteen minutes later, a group of perplexed officers were gathered in the

Hydroponics control module, pressing the stranger to explain himself.

Nobody seemed to notice that Ailsa was still in the room, perched cross-

legged on the low storage unit next to the waste hatch.

'You would have us believe, Doctor,' said Acting Chief Officer Rowan,

'that you arrived on our ship in a wooden box which can appear anywhere

in space?'

'That would be a rather simplistic explanation, yes.' The Doctor noted

an exasperated look appear on Ailsa's father's worn face and quickly

added, 'But it is the truth.'

'This ship is entirely sealed. How could you have possibly come on

board?'

The question went unanswered, as at that point the Captain, who had

been listening quietly, spoke up. 'Doctor, I am Acting Captain Llewellyn.

You must understand that we're an isolated community and we can't take

any risks. I'm a reasonable man and I'm willing to accept you mean us

no harm, but if you've breached our hull it could have potentially fatal

consequences for us all.'

The Doctor stroked his chin. 'Captain, I can assure you that I have caused no damage, except for maybe some of your grasses back there. You would detect some drop in pressure had the hull been damaged.'

'You are mistaken, Doctor. The pressure in the Hermes is identical to the pressure outside on the planet's surface.'

It was the Doctor's turn to look confused. 'You mean to tell me, Captain, that this ship is not in transit?'

'Of course not. The Hermes has been here for over a century. We are settlers here.'

'Inside your ship?'

'How would you not know this, since you entered here?' Rowan interjected.

'I told you, it's complicated... '

'Unless...' The question hung for a moment, as Acting Commander Edwards searched for words for her theory.'... You are here to rescue us?'

Llewellyn turned on her. 'We do not need rescuing. This is our *home.'*

'A home that is falling apart, sir.'

'We have what we need, Acting Commander.'

'Except the fuel to leave this planet and its shadows behind.'

The silence was uncomfortable as Llewellyn and Edwards eyed each other with distrust. Fortunately the Doctor stepped in. 'Maybe you can explain to me what has happened here? I might be able to help.'

Llewellyn sighed and shook his head. He waved his hand to the other

officers and, to Ailsa's surprise, it was her father who spoke next.

'We are the third generation of settlers on this planet. Our grandparents

came here 102 years and 11 months ago to found a colony. It was to be

called New Cambria.'

This was a story Ailsa had heard many times before. Her mother liked

to tell the story her own mother had taught her, which her mother had

taught her before that. She liked to hear the story at night when the wind

whistled over the superstructure, when she could cuddle close and not be

scared of the shadows.

'Their landing site was, they thought, well chosen. The Hermes put down

near the shore of the largest continent, on a high grassy meadow above

a fertile wooded valley. Everything seemed perfect, it was a home worthy

of the twelve years they had spent on board this ship. This was before the

shadows came.'

'The shadows?'

'The summer after they arrived, the skies darkened. Noises came

from *the* forest and some people fell sick. There were those who began

to question whether the planet really was uninhabited. Captain Santos

and the ship's officers went into the forest to investigate and they never

returned. Those who went to look for them at *the* forest edge told of

singing, bright lights and dark shadows that moved. They all came back

full of fever and sickness.'

Llewellyn raised his head and spoke. 'The day came when the sun rose

but hardly shone. There was a sickly smell in the air and the noises from

the forest were at their loudest. My grandfather persuaded the settlers to

take shelter in the ship. They brought the animals and the stores of seeds,

as well as what possessions they could carry, but a fierce storm whipped up

and they had little time. His plan was to secure the ship against whatever

was out there, to shelter until it was safe to come out. As the airlocks

closed, my grandfather saw the shadows moving above the forest, and

heard their wailing.'

The Doctor considered the story. 'Is it still not safe to go outside?'

'We cannot see outside,' said Edwards. 'The shadows wrecked our

sensors in the storm. We can't even scan for life forms, if we were even

sure the shadows would show up.'

'So you stay in the ship?'

'What else can we do Doctor?' Llewellyn levelled a stern gaze at him. We

hear the wind from time to time and the shadows beat on the hull. I cannot

allow anyone in my care to go outside, for fear of the shadows coming in.

It would be *the* end of us all. All we can do is keep life on this old ship

going, and hope one day that someone comes to the Ardelban system to

look for us.'

The Doctor suddenly became animated. The Ardelban system? A yellow

dwarf star with three small planets and a gas giant?'

'I believe so Doctor. You do know where you are then?'

'I do. In fact, I've been here before! Accidentally crash-landed on the -'

He broke off abruptly, a look of horror on his face. 'Maybe I shouldn't say,'

he said. 'It's long after your time.'

He grinned and Ailsa stifled a laugh. Though everyone else was

watching him sceptically the Doctor pressed on regardless.

'There is only one inhabitable planet in this system, unless you can

breathe sulphur, so we must be there. It is a planet well known to botanists

because of a spectacular event that takes place every thousand years. This

is the home of the most amazing plants in the universe!'

Though the Captain could hardly have looked less impressed, this

certainly had Ailsa's interest.

The Ardelban Blue Pine, though not strictly a pine as you understand,

is the lure that draws scientists here from across the galaxy. It flowers

once every thousand years, releasing huge amounts of spores and pollen

into the atmosphere.' The Doctor turned. 'Of course! The pollen is a mild

hallucinogen, and also somewhat toxic to most life forms, which would

explain the panic that overtook everyone and the sickness of those who

went anywhere near the trees. The cycle comes to a head when the amount

of pollen released triggers heavy storms, which washes the roots of the

trees and helps fertilise them. An ingenious system for reproduction on a

world with no animal life, I think you'll find.'

The Doctor's train of thought suddenly hit the buffers as he realised the

magnitude of what had happened. 'Your grandparents,' he said with some

sadness, 'were on the wrong end of a very unlucky bit of bad timing.'

'What you are saying is that there are no shadows, and we could go

outside any time we like?' spluttered Edwards.

'Essentially yes. In fact, I'd be happy to prove the theory.'

'You will do nothing of the sort!' barked Llewellyn. 'I am still the Acting

Captain of this vessel and I will not have the safety of my crew threatened

by some... flamboyant crackpot! For all we know you could be a shadow

yourself!'

'You'll never know what is out there,' said the Doctor, looking straight at

Ailsa for the first time, 'unless you trust to follow where your heart leads

you.'

The two officers turned at once to their Captain. 'Sir, I think we...'

'Leave it, Rowan. Both of you. The Doctor is getting back into his box

and going right back where he came from.'

The Doctor protested, but it fell on deaf ears, or at least the ears of one

too afraid to hear. As the adults argued, none of them saw Ailsa slip from

the control room, her head spinning with what the Doctor had told them.

The most amazing plants in the universe? Waiting in the sunshine, just

beyond the thick metal walls of her home?

It was only twenty minutes later when Ailsa stood before the airlock

doors. They weren't guarded; nobody on board would risk a meeting with

the shadows. She had spent all her years being told to be afraid of the

creatures in the darkness, but nobody she knew had ever seen them. She

thought of her mother and her pictures, of the grass and the sea and the

sky. That was where her heart was, and that was where she was going.

Four. Two. Five. One.

Her father's security code was a poorly kept secret. She stepped over the

high metal rail and entered *the* airlock, hitting the code one more time

to lock the door behind her. She heard the alarm begin to sound, and the

rushing of feet from *the* mess hall. Heavy hands beat on the thick glass and

muffled voices shouted in panic.

Ailsa looked round to see Acting Corporal Barker's face pressed up to

the glass, pleading with her to come out. There was so much fear there,

in those friendly eyes. Fear of something none of them had ever seen. The

Doctor had been so sure, so confident. How could he be wrong?

She turned away from the shouting and wondered for a moment which

would be the worst outcome, meeting the shadows or facing the anger of

the Captain. He would be here soon, he would be able to stop her. Maybe

that would be best: she'd be scolded a bit but they'd all be so relieved that

they'd soon let her go back to her plants and her studies. Yeah, it would

be so much easier to go back in. But if she was ever to find out what lay

beyond those doors, she had to do it now.

Curiosity triumphed once more.

Reaching up to the release lever, heavy and stiff with age, she pulled

down on it with all her strength. It stuck for a heartbeat and then the

mechanism sprang back to life like some lumbering monster, aroused

from a long sleep. Light flooded into the airlock, and a blast of fresh air,

with all its unfamiliar smells, came surging in. Her heart now singing with

belief, Ailsa stepped forward to where she knew she had to go.

The watching crewmen were silent, straining their eyes against the

unfamiliar light. Outside the airlock door, a young girl stood in the waving

grass, her long hair blowing in the warm wind, laughing.

Potential

Stephen Dunn

An adventure of the Third Doctor

When people talk about the past, they tell it as a complete story, as if they

remember it all exactly. But that's not how memory works. Or at least not

how my memory works. I remember brief snippets or snapshots and my

imagination fills in the gaps.

And even knowing this, I could not tell you if these snapshots represented

just a frozen segment of time or rather my mind's amalgamation of

events.

Case in point - three snapshots.

A door.

A school bully, fist raised high, wild red hair trailing behind him as he

delivered his blow. His victim with tears streaming down his face.

A strange man dressed in a frilled shirt and velvet jacket.

You probably won't even have heard of the school I went to. It's closed now

anyway. With 160 students, Bowman's Grammar School had a large clock

tower which could be seen from miles around and meant that no boy ever

had an excuse to be late for classes. Thompson, whose first name no one

ever used, and maybe never knew, was one of the most feared of the school

bullies. Although he was in the form below us he was several inches taller

than me and most of the pupils in my year.

He was also the only one that had any real luck with girls. Being at a

boys' school meant that girls were even more alien to us than to most other

boys that age. Thompson had an effortless way about him like it all came

really easy. His long hair singled him out and made him look like a rock

star. His was a hairstyle that needed confidence. Had we worn our hair that

long we would have looked like sissies.

We were all growing through gawky, elongated shapes, skin exploding

in pustules and never sure what our voices were doing. Maybe Thompson

felt he was missing out, and that's why he made it so hard for everyone.

His victim this time, Scott, had made the mistake of being n years-old,

freckled and toffee-advert cute.

I had spoken to Scott about the bullying. In fact, I had been bullied at

his age. Parents, teachers and friends tell you to fight back - that bullies

are cowards - but sometimes you are just too small and the bully is just

too big and strong. I soon discovered that what the bully often wanted was

entertainment. Keep quiet, don't complain and soon the bully would find

someone else.

Except Thompson did not want anybody else. Scott wept even before Thompson hit him, pale grey snot dripping from his nose.

I told Scott to tell someone, a teacher, anyone. But he refused. The punishment for 'splitting' - telling on someone to the teachers - was harsh. Harsher, perhaps, than what he was already suffering.

And so I found myself looking at a door. The door. The door of my snapshot. A door that once had been wood, but that had been painted so often over the years it looked warped and plastic.

Beyond it lay the headmaster, Mr Barraclough. A small man, very strict but with a reputation for being scrupulously fair. A man who, despite his size, all the pupils were afraid of. We all knew it wasn't fair but we called him Hitler. I suspect most schools have a teacher with that nickname, but at the time we thought that we were so very original.

I stood, I wavered and I walked away.

I decided I was not going to get involved and turned my mind to other things. I walked towards sickbay. Jamieson had told us that he had seen a very pretty blonde woman working in there. And while it was not wise to believe anything Jamieson said, it felt worth checking out. Sickbay was full at the moment as several sixth-formers had returned from their

Duke

of Edinburgh's Award expedition on Dartmoor with a strange tummy bug,

looking as white as sheets.

I stood around, trying to look casual, hoping to catch a glimpse of the

pretty blonde while telling myself I was more likely to see the ancient grey-

haired matron instead.

I looked out of the first floor window. I saw Thompson, fist raised. Scott,

tears streaming. The second snapshot.

Thinking back, with this image in my mind, I realise that it seems posed.

Perhaps reflecting my love of comic books at the time. A cover promising

'Superman versus Batman and only one can survive!' Imagination may

have warped the reality but the truth remains the same. Whatever angle it

happened at, Scott was getting another beating.

I reminded myself that I was not going to get involved. Neither of them

were worth it. I came to a decision. This was not my battle. But still I

watched.

Suddenly, a man strode out of sickbay. I thought he was a new teacher

and appraised him quickly. Most of our teachers wore suits or at least

jackets with leather patches on the elbows. But this man had on a dark

green velvet jacket, no tie and a ruffled shirt. If I saw him today I would

have thought of Austin Powers but then I recalled a poster of Jimi Hendrix

that a friend had on his bedroom wall. My third snapshot. He exuded

confidence and strange, adult cool. I assumed he only taught the sixth-

formers.

I looked back to the fight. If one boy totally flattening another can be

called a fight.

I realised that the teacher was unaware of what was going on outside.

'Sir?' I said. I wanted to say more but the words caught in my mouth.

'What is it, boy?' he snapped.

Any courage I had drained away. I pointed weakly to the scene below.

His gaze softened.

'Don't look at him as he is now,' he said. 'Look at him as he has the

potential to be.' The voice was authoritative, well spoken, with a hint of

the theatrical.

And then he just walked away. He was heading towards an empty

classroom and I knew that there was no other way out. He'd have to come

back. He'd have to stop the fight. I would wait for him to return. Perhaps

he had gone to get a cane, which was the usual treatment for bullies.

Suddenly there was a strange noise that almost seemed to defy

description; a pulsating, grinding that resonated through my very being.

I ran to the classroom, but before I even got there I knew that he would

be gone. And I couldn't believe what he'd done. He was a grown-up! He

had seen what was happening! He could have stopped Thompson, saved

Scott. He should have! I was so furious I thumped one of the desks, bruising

my hand for days afterwards.

But I knew deep down that it wasn't him I was really angry with.

I was back at the door. And this time I went through. I told Barraclough

about the bullying, but not about the strange man in a stranger suit.

The bullying stopped. Splitters have to be punished, so I got punched

a few times and my hair was pulled so tightly that even now, many years

later, it will not comb flat at the back.

If this was a proper story, rather than remembered fragments, I would

finish off by telling you that Scott became a barrister and that Thompson

ended badly. I sometimes hope so. But the simple fact of the matter is that

I don't know. I could look them up on the internet, or I could ask around.

But I prefer not to, because what happened to them wasn't ever what was

important. What matters about this story is what those snapshots did to

me. What I do now. The difference I try to make.

No, it's not easy. But if I don't make the effort, who will?

I often think of what that strange teacher said. At *the* time, I thought

he

had been speaking about Thompson or Scott. As *the* years have passed, I

have become more and more convinced that he was talking about me.

Second Chances

Bernard OToole

An adventure of the Eighth Doctor, with Charley

The Doctor hauled himself up to the top of the gantry, trying to ignore *the*

pain from the cut on his head. Up ahead, Krellig stood at the control panel,

pulling frantically at the levers. The observatory roof creaked slowly open,

revealing the night sky and the terrible lashing rain.

The Doctor steadied himself as the gantry swung into position. 'It's over

Krellig! Step away from the controls.'

'Ah, Doctor,' sneered Krellig. 'Such persistence! But shouldn't you be

helping poor Miss Pollard? She seems somewhat... occupied!' He laughed

as his cloak billowed out behind him in the wind.

The Doctor looked down to the laboratory, thirty feet below. Charley

Pollard was backing into a corner as three of Krellig's security robots - the

Klankers - advanced towards her. Their clumsy metal snappers reached

towards her throat.

'Hang on Charley!' the Doctor shouted down.

'Oh, take your time,' she called back, not quite disguising her fear. 'No

rush.'

'Krellig!' the Doctor shouted. 'You can't access that satellite. I won't let

you!' The Doctor reached into his pocket and pulled out a small plastic

device, held together with sticky tape.

'Is that... a TV remote control?' laughed Krellig. 'Not very impressive, Doctor.'

'You haven't seen what it can do,' said the Doctor. 'Especially seeing as I've modified it.'

The Doctor stabbed at the remote in his hand.

Below them, the Klankers began to spin uncontrollably, banging together. Their claws hacking at each other, sparks showering the lab.

'Run Charley!' shouted the Doctor. Charley darted past the Klankers and out of *the* observatory.

'What have you done?' shouted Krellig.

'Oh, I don't think your little robots enjoy such high frequencies.'

The Klankers were spinning towards the focusing ring in the centre of the room. The Doctor could see *the* dials on Krellig's control panels all heading into the red. 'Perhaps it's time I was leaving... ' he said as he scurried down *the* gantry after Charley.

'No!' screamed Krellig, as the Klankers hit the focusing ring head on - and exploded.

Krellig stumbled from *the* burning building, his whole life going up in flames, coughing and spluttering and minus a shoe. Up ahead he saw *the* Doctor and Charley opening the door of a large blue box. The Doctor paused to smile and wave at Krellig before slamming the door closed behind them.

Krellig sank to his knees, choking for breath. His eyes widened at the

sight before him, the Doctor's blue box fading away into nothing. He

looked behind him as the roof of his observatory collapsed. Then it was

gone. All of it. The control room. His robot servants. His computers. His

dreams.

He left before the fire engines arrived. Too many awkward questions he

should avoid. Without his shoe, he walked lopsidedly through the night,

in the driving rain. His mind relived his defeat, going over how it was

possible that someone with his superior intellect could be thwarted by a

couple of oddballs in fancy dress.

As dawn approached, he realised that, in his daze, he had ended up in

the one place he hadn't been to in many years - home. The cobbled streets

of a working-class town stretched out before him. He rubbed his tired eyes

and looked down at his bare foot. It was time for desperate measures.

Krellig stood dripping in the hallway as his mother fussed round him.

She peppered his cheeks with kisses in the way that only a mother can. 'Of

course you can stay, love!' she told him. 'Your room is just how you left

it. Oh, I've been so worried about you! Not even a card at Christmas!' She

licked her thumb and rubbed at the dirt on his face. He grimaced.

'We'll

have to find you something to wear. Go and see your father. He's in his

shed.' Krellig's face dropped. 'Oh go on,' she reassured him. 'He won't

bite!'

There was no avoiding it. He dragged his feet through the house towards

the back door.

'I've still got your favourite mug in one of the cupboards!' his mother

called to him. 'I'll have a look for it.'

He grunted a response and went outside.

Arthur stroked his prize pigeon affectionately as Krellig entered. Krellig

knew he was a disappointment to his father. He always had been. That's

what made standing here even more humbling - that he had proven him

right. Krellig's head hung low as his father looked him up and down

before sighing heavily and turning back to the plump bird.

'No loud music. And no friends allowed in after eight o'clock.'

Krellig nodded submissively.

'And you'll have to earn your keep! There'll be no freeloading here.'

Krellig waited for more, but Arthur was already back with his pigeons.

He turned and quickly left, just grateful to have got it over with. His

mother stood at the kitchen window waving excitedly. She held up a

chipped A-Team mug. He forced a smile.

The following morning, Krellig stood waiting outside the fishmonger's

as

his mother made small talk with the man behind the counter. It was hardly

his ideal choice of how to spend the day, but he grabbed any excuse to get

out of the house and away from his father. The old man was already laying

down the law, leaving the local paper open on the job page with a ring of

red ink around every dead-end job he could find. Krellig suddenly caught

sight of his own reflection in the shop window. He turned away, unable

to look himself in the eye. What the hell had happened to him? Only days

ago he'd been a different man. A stronger man. A fearful man. Yes, fearful.

He had put fear into the hearts of those that had opposed him - and had

savoured every moment.

The Doctor's assistant, Charley. Oh, she had known true fear thanks to

Krellig. Having failed to pin anything on his projects in the city, she and

the Doctor had come snooping round Krellig's out-of-town laboratory. He

had watched her on the monitor as she entered through the underground

tunnel, oblivious to the fact she was being observed.

Charley peered cautiously round the corner. The tunnel stretched far into

the distance, dimly lit by just a few lights in the ceiling. She stepped into

the tunnel. The heels of her boots reverberated noisily on *the* stone floor.

Krellig watched her for a moment, before pulling a lever on his console.

The lights in the corridor went out.

Charley froze. Her heart leapt. She thrust her hands over her mouth,

muffling the involuntary gasp of fright. For a moment she stood there,

paralysed, waiting. Then she reached out her hand to touch the cold stone

wall and backed away in the direction she had come.

There was silence... but Krellig could hear her short, sharp breaths. He

could even hear her heart thumping. He changed the view on his monitor

to infrared. His mouth curled into a smile. He could see the fear in her

unseeing eyes. It was *the* greatest rush of all.

He focused the camera in closer until her face filled the screen. Her eyes

were so wide, staring desperately into *the* dark.

'And now for the best bit,' he muttered. He tapped a series of commands

into his console.

Her eyes widened as, in the distance, she heard a click-click... A shuffling...

She clearly couldn't make out what it was, but the noise reverberated

through *the* passageways, definitely getting closer.

'H-hello?' she spluttered. 'Oh Doctor, please let it be you!'

Her eyes darted from left to right. The noise she was hearing was all around her now. Almost upon her.

Suddenly, a metal claw swung out from the darkness, clamping around her throat and stifling her scream.

Krellig spoke softly into the microphone, with a tone that was almost compassionate. 'Don't struggle. You'll only make things worse.'

Her eyes widened in terror as *the* metal pincers pinned her to the spot.

'So weak... So helpless...' he whispered. A satisfied smile creeping across his face.

Krellig was snapped back into the present by the coarse voice speaking to him. 'Bloody 'ell! It's the professor!'

Krellig looked up to see several men of similar age to him. All wore football shirts that were far too small and exposed their tattooed forearms.

The gang all took great amusement in Krellig's presence on the high street. Krellig looked away in annoyance, trying to ignore them.

'Professor! Remember us? The old classmates!'

'Classmates?' he said dryly.

'Yeah, we remember you. A right weirdo.'

Krellig frowned. He should let this go. There were bigger things on the agenda. Plans to be making. But the rage within him was building.

He turned to face them, looked at their leader with a steely stare.

'You know me?' he said. 'You think you know me? You don't know me at all. Your kind could barely comprehend what I am. Who I am. What

I

represent! Your miserable little existence means nothing when compared

to my superior intellect and the plans I have for all of you. Do you

understand me, you worthless wretch?'

Krellig's beating was swift and severe. He lay on the floor, badly winded

and clutching his stomach. His lip was busted and bleeding on his shirt.

The gang carried on down the street, laughing at Krellig. He looked up

at them, cursing under his breath. They'd *get what* was coming to them, he

thought. They'd all *get what was* coming...

As the days passed by, Krellig's life settled into a dull routine. He sat, arms

folded, looking round the job centre in disgust. Is this really what it's like to

be normal? he thought to himself. The perpetual boredom. The lack *of hope*. The rubbish daytime *TV*. He was above all this - the rest were beneath him - mere

pond scum. In his new order, they would kneel before him, trembling at

the very mention of his name.

'Name?' said the young woman behind the desk.

'Krellig!' he boomed with authority.

'First name?'

He fidgeted awkwardly with the buttons of his dad's hand-me-down

cardigan and leaned forward to whisper. 'It's, erm, Dennis.'

'Age?'

He let out a long, lingering sigh. 'Thirty-eight.'

She tapped at the keyboard and chewed gum loudly as he waited.

'Actually, I'm quite good with computers. Well, more than good to be

honest. Perhaps if there were a job where I -'

'This might do you,' she interrupted. 'This vacancy has just come in.'

He leaned forward to look at the screen. His face dropped in horror.

That night, Krellig lay in bed, under the covers. He held a torch in one

hand, shining down as he scribbled into a notebook. He finished a

sketch of a robot with huge metal teeth. Underneath was the description :

'Klanker Mark Two'. He chewed the pencil as he sank deep into thought.

Oh, how he missed his Klankers. It seemed like only yesterday that he'd

built the first one and activated it. His bottom lip trembled as it turned to

him and rasped the word 'Master...' Oh, happy days.

His mother entered, in her dressing gown and curlers. She placed a

cup of cocoa on the table beside him. He peered out from the covers,

concealing his notebook. She sat next to him, stroking his hair. 'Don't be

nervous about tomorrow, love,' she whispered. 'First days are always the

worst.' She stood and tucked him in before leaving.

Krellig tried sleeping, but a nightmare caused him to toss and turn. It

was the moment that everything changed, the beginning of the end. It

was the day the Doctor and his companion appeared at Shield Industries

with no explanation. Until then, it had been the perfect cover for Krellig

to launch his master plan. No one else had suspected him. No one else

could have...

On the top floor of the city centre office block, the champagne reception

was in full flow. Krellig's eyes followed the Doctor around the room. There

was something about this stranger. Something bad. Krellig could hear the

questions he was asking. Technical. Specific. Yet he disguised them with

childish ignorance and wit. Krellig tensed up as the Doctor edged his way

up to him.

'So Mr Krellig... Not one of the suits I take it?' said the Doctor as he

glanced with amusement at the huddle of corporate types.

'Do I know you?' said Krellig with suspicion.

'No, no. Never met. Heard a lot about you though. It's been interesting

to hear about your inventions. The trans-neural thingy'.

'The trans-neural interface. I don't suppose you understand it.'

'I don't suppose I do,' beamed the Doctor. Krellig could tell he knew far

more than he was letting on and made a note to tell him nothing else.

'So what else are you working on, Mr Krellig?'

'These days, I'm more of an... *advisor* to the company.'

'Scientific advisor, eh? Done a bit of that myself.'

'Have you really?' said Krellig with as much disdain as he could muster.

The Doctor moved in closer to Krellig, invading his space. 'Tell me, do

they give you weekends off? I never got that. Should have made it a deal

clincher so to speak. Though they did give me a car... of sorts.'

Krellig backed away. There was no time for this. The computer virus

he had planted in the system would activate in a matter of hours. He had

preparations to make. He placed his glass on the tray and turned back

towards his laboratory. 'If you'll excuse me', he said dryly.

'Of course! You crack on. Got to keep the board happy, eh?'

But Krellig was already striding down the corridor into his office. The

metal door sliding closed behind him as deadbolts locked into place.

Safely inside, he activated the CCTV monitor out in the hallway. He could

see the Doctor outside. His companion approached. Krellig turned up the

volume.

'Having fun, Charley?'

'Hardly! I've never met such a dull bunch! Doctor, what's a

spreadsheet?'

'It's their equivalent of a sonic screwdriver. They'd be lost without

them.'

'Have you found out anything?'

'Well it appears Shield Industries is exactly what it seems. Those

satellite

tracking codes weren't hacked by any of this lot. I think our attention

should be on their scientific advisor, Mr Krellig.'

'You mean that odd-looking fellow?'

'He's the reason we're here, I'm sure of it.'

With an annoyed snort, Krellig snapped the monitor off and activated a

communicator. 'Prepare for my arrival. It's time.'

A mechanical, grating voiced hissed in reply 'Yes, Master.'

Krellig's nightmares continued throughout the night. And things didn't

get any better. The next morning, he found himself in the darkest pit of

all mankind: the biscuit factory. He stood at the conveyor belt as custard

creams spewed out towards him. His task was to spot any broken ones

and quickly remove them. With such mindless repetition, all he had to

focus on were his thoughts. His memories. His nightmares of that night

in the observatory, when the Doctor and his companion had traced Krellig

to his lair...

With the satellite coming into range, Krellig and the Doctor tangled

furiously.

'Krellig! The world is a good place, filled with good people! It doesn't

have to be this way!'

'Spare me the speech, Doctor. The world is filled with insignificance!

People will learn to serve me... or die!'

As Krellig's rage reached boiling point, he realised it was all a distraction.

The girl - Charley - was edging her way to the focusing ring, brandishing

a hammer. 'The girl!' he shouted. 'What is she doing?'

Charley looked up and could see Krellig's worried face looking down

at her. 'Weak and helpless am I, Krellig?' She raised the hammer... and

brought it crashing down on the focusing ring.

'No!' he screamed as shards of glass and metal scattered across *the*

laboratory floor.

'You should never underestimate Charley, Krellig,' laughed the Doctor

'Klankers!' screamed Krellig as his robots sprang to life. 'Destroy her!'

The robots advanced, their claws snapping like metal crabs. Krellig pushed

the Doctor away and climbed the gantry towards the control panel.

The Doctor looked helplessly at Charley, as the crude robots edged

closer to her. The observatory roof was creaking open, revealing the night

sky and the terrible lashing rain outside...

Krellig was snapped back to reality by the piles of broken biscuits amassed

on the conveyor belt in front of him.

He was marched to the office to get his dressing-down. His supervisor

sat behind the big fat desk, drumming his fingers on the keyboard of his

big fat computer. He leaned back in his chair as he eyed Krellig. The harsh

fluorescent lights reflected on his shiny bald head.

'I mean, you do want the job don't you? You do need the job?'

'Yes,' hissed Krellig through gritted teeth. 'I need the job.'

'And it's not as if it's rocket science is it? It's not like you need to be some

kind of super genius.'

Krellig kept his hands clasped behind his back. His fists clenched so

tightly his knuckles were white.

'We understand each other then?'

Krellig snapped a response. 'Yes.'

'Yes...?' The supervisor raised an eyebrow and barely held back his smug

grin.

'Yes sir,' said Krellig. He looked away, suddenly ashamed by his weakness.

Just days ago he was on the verge of ultimate power. Now he was nothing.

He looked up at his supervisor. He could see the arrogance in the man.

The defiance. The look of superiority and the rush he was getting from it.

It was a look Krellig knew all too well. It was the way he used to be.

After work, Krellig coppered up the remainder of the money his dad had

lent him and ordered another pint. His fifth in fact. He'd decided long ago

that alcohol would be banned in his new order, an unnecessary comfort.

Yet for now it would serve a purpose...

He saw his reflection in *the* mirror behind the bar. He was still

wearing

his hair net and white smock. Oh, what had he become? He was once

Krellig the Mighty, Krellig the Defiant... But now he was just Krellig the

biscuit-packer.

And it was all the Doctor's fault.

Krellig slammed his pint glass down. Enough was enough. No self-

respecting super villain should have to live this way. He stomped out of the

pub and staggered across the road to the biscuit factory. The place would

be quiet now. Just a handful of night workers and cleaning staff.

Krellig tiptoed through the shop floor and slipped carefully into *the* office.

He turned on the computer. His jaw was set with anger and determination.

It was time for revenge.

He accessed *the* internet - his fingers typing furiously, keen to unleash

his fury and intellect on an unsuspecting world. Time and time again, he

found security programs blocking his way. Firewalls trying to deflect him.

Each time, he evaded them. Each time, he pushed forward. Each time, his

superior knowledge triumphed over those who tried to stop him. Within

moments, he'd gained access to the national defence computer, looking

for any back door access into the mainframe. He knew it would take

them

just seconds to realise they were being hacked and then to trace him, but

by then the damage would be done. It would be over.

And then he found it: the launch codes to nuclear warheads.

'Over is it, Doctor?' he said with a drunken slur. 'Krellig says when it's

over... not you!' He laughed defiantly, the way he used to.

His fingers hit the keys in a frenzy. And then it was done. His pass codes

accepted. All he had to do was give the order and everything would end.

Every worthless life would be snuffed out. If he couldn't rule then there

would be nothing left for anyone else. There was no one here worth saving

anyway. His finger hovered over the enter key, ready to stab down on it.

Then the door suddenly opened.

Krellig looked up, startled.

'D-Dennis?' said a female voice in surprise.

He couldn't make out the figure stood in silhouette in the doorway.

Then she stepped inside.

It was Maureen.

Krellig's jaw dropped open. It had been years since he saw her last, and

now here she was - brandishing a mop.

'Dennis... is that you?'

'Maureen?'

She smiled. Oh god, that smile was just how he remembered it. It took

him back to that night years earlier as they queued to see E.T. Their first

date. Their only date. It was one of the last times he could recall ever being

happy.

'I didn't know you worked here!'

'Y-Yeah. Just started.'

'On the computers? Blimey, you must be clever! What are you working

on?'

He looked down at his finger, just inches from the enter key. He quickly

stood and pulled the power cable from the back of the computer.

'Erm, nothing. Just biscuit stuff. I'd better go.' He rushed past her, not

daring to look back.

Krellig didn't sleep well that night. As he tossed and turned, he could hear

the Doctor's words echoing in his mind. 'Krellig! The world is a good

place, filled with good people! It doesn't have to be this way... '

The Doctor reached out, and Krellig shoved him aside. But it wasn't the

Doctor, it was Maureen.

Krellig woke abruptly, bolting upright in his bed. He had nearly killed

her, he had nearly killed everyone.

It was a little after three in the morning. He swung out of bed, slipping

his feet into his dad's old slippers, and rested his weary head in his hands.

There was a lot of thinking to do.

Krellig stood on the street corner, fidgeting nervously and trying not to

look shifty. Maureen approached, pushing a pram. A toddler was clinging

onto it, struggling to keep up. She didn't notice Krellig watching them.

Maureen wasn't someone that would perhaps be easily noticed. She wasn't

that pretty, she wasn't that slim and she certainly didn't have any kind of

power. And yet he found himself willing her to look up, to notice him. All

those years ago he'd felt frustrated that no one ever noticed him - or if they

did that they were disappointed by what they saw. He'd run away to prove

them all wrong. But they still didn't notice him there.

And then Maureen looked up at him, startled. There you are!' she

said. 'I wondered where you rushed off to last night! Thought you'd done

another disappearing act.'

Embarrassed, he struggled to look her in *the* eye. He couldn't help but

smile. He tried holding it back but it was no use. He wanted to tell her

everything; what he'd been planning, who he had been, how clever it all

was. But the words just wouldn't come out.

She laughed. 'You haven't changed! Still all wide-eyed and excitable. Like

when you were doing your experiments... or one of your daft

inventions!'

He nodded towards the children. 'You're married,' he said.

'Twice!' she laughed. 'Both losers! Never was any use at keeping the good guys!'

He tried not to blush. An awkward silence followed.

'Well...' she said. 'I suppose I should get off to the Co-Op. It's two for one on cottage pies.'

He nodded understandingˆ Of course. She must have better things to do than talk to a misfit like him. She smiled and began to walk off.

He took a deep breath and spoke. 'Actually... I love cottage pie.'

'Yeah?' She smiled back at him. 'Well maybe we'll invite you round for tea... Ifyou push.'

He stepped forward eagerly and grasped the pram.

She rested her hand on his. 'So where have you been all these years? I always wondered what happened to you. What have you been up to?'

He paused to find the words. Something profound. Something meaningful. But in the end, he found he couldn't even look her in the eye.

'I've been a fool,' he said simply.

Maureen smiled understandingˆ She linked her arm in his and they all walked off together down the road.

Child's Play

LM Myles

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Romana

'Now,' *said* Romana. *'What's a* nice teddy bear like you doing in a dark sweet shop like this?'

The *teddy bear tried to smile,* though the threads of his mouth were tightly stitched.

He removed his arm from the jar *of peppermint creams* and didn't look the least bit guilty about the chocolate smeared over his paw.

'Look,' he said, somehow. Romana suspected telepathy. 'Can we talk about this?'

I was late for work Saturday morning but it didn't make much difference.

I was tired, had two essays to finish for uni and wasn't looking forward

to spending most of the day alone in a dusty old toy shop, with too many

shadows and too many old floorboards.

Usually when I arrived at work I always tried to open up as quickly as

possible and not look at the shop across the road, all boarded up now.

It had been nothing more innocuous than a kids' clothes shop, but the

owners had packed up and left with barely a word. There'd been a rumour

going round that the husband had gone a bit daft, started seeing things,

talking about ghosts, or maybe it was goblins. At the time I'd laughed

along with everyone else.

But when I got to the toy shop that day there were already two people

waiting outside: a pretty blonde in a fab scarlet dress and a man with

a

shock of chestnut curls. He looked like he'd walked off an album cover

from *the* sixties.

Their heads were close together and they talked quietly, surreptitious

glances at the window every few seconds, and then the blonde looked

straight at me and smiled. I gave her a nod, fished out my keys. The bell

rang as I opened the door and the pair followed me inside.

'Can I help you?' I asked, dumping the float on *the* desk and opening

the cash register.

'I'm the Doctor,' said the man, 'and this is Romana.' She gave a little

wave, said hello, smiled sweetly, and continued to browse between the

jigsaws and board games, pausing to stare at Mouse Trap.

'Kirsty,' I said, resisting the urge to offer my hand and wishing that

the shop didn't attract quite so many eccentric tourists. 'You looking for

anything in particular?'

'No, no.' He smiled and it did absolutely nothing to reassure me. 'I don't

suppose you've noticed anything out of the ordinary around here lately?'

Apart from you? I wanted to ask, but working in the shop for the past

few months had taught me more than a little about tact and what I really

shouldn't say to customers. 'Don't think so.' I started sorting out *the*

coppers. 'I'll keep an eye out though.'

'Good,' he said before wandering off to join his companion, who now appeared to be conducting an intensive investigation of the train sets.

I finished dividing out the coins and closed the register. No more customers. Not even anyone out on the street. I sighed, looking around the impeccably neat shelves for something to tidy, before settling on finding out exactly what those two were doing at the back of the shop. They didn't strike me as shoplifters, too indiscreet for one thing, but you could never really tell.

I snuck between the shelves, edging carefully and quietly. The whispering grew louder. I could make out a word or two. Then I realised that there weren't just two voices. There were three.

I held my breath as I slid between two rows of shelves, getting as close as I could without disturbing them. Their attention was taken up by the dolls.

In particular a pink lump dressed in a sparkling blue dress with googly eyes. It was a monstrous thing, but somewhere in the world there'd be, presumably, a child who would adore it.

The eyes moved. 'I've no idea what you're talking about,' something said. Not the man, not the woman. 'We just got here. Besides we're not doing anything. Just looking around.'

'Well, you've been noticed,' said the Doctor. 'And you've panicked a

few

locals. So it might just be best to stop and...' He paused, peered forward,

looked straight into the doll's eyes. 'The connection's gone.'

He shook the doll. 'Hmm. Doesn't seem to be anything on this end.

Some sort of temporal projection?'

Romana wrinkled her nose. 'Felt more like a spatial distortion. The

temporal flux is just a side-effect of moving light years instantaneously. If

they're managing to animate these -'

'Romana,' said the Doctor carefully. 'I think someone's

eavesdropping.'

'Do you?' She spun around, and there was that smile again. 'Oh, hello.'

'What did you do?' I asked, trying to stop my voice from trembling. 'That

doll isn't supposed to talk.'

'It isn't?' asked the Doctor, all innocence.

I frowned, pushed past him and snatched it up. 'No,' I said. 'What's

going on? Who are you two?'

'Kirsty,' said Romana. 'Has anything odd been going on here?'

I looked from one to the other, took a deep breath and hesitated. I

thought about how I'd laughed at the rumours about the mad old man

in the clothes shop over the street and suddenly felt horribly ashamed.

I hadn't known then, I swear I hadn't, but it wouldn't have mattered. I

would have stayed quiet anyway. And now this woman was looking at me

in a way that made me think I could say the most unbelievable things and

she'd somehow find a way to fit them into her world.

So I told them. I told them about the noises and the creaks and the little

sounds that the shadows made. I told them how sometimes I saw things

moving out of the corner of my eyes and once I heard a voice muttering

behind me but it was silent when I turned around.

I told them that I hated my job, that I needed it, that I was terrified and

they had to do something and make everything better and they could do

that, couldn't they?

The woman, Romana, patted my shoulder and told me it would be all

right. I looked into her eyes and believed her. 'I used to love toy shops,' I

said. They always made me think of Christmas.'

'You've been a lot of help,' said the Doctor. He wasn't smiling now, but

I wasn't scared of him any more. There was something very reassuring

about the seriousness of his expression. 'Now, have you ever opened up

and found the door unlocked?'

I stared at him, could feel myself paling. 'Yes,' I said, knowing exactly

how much trouble I'd be in if anyone ever found out about that. 'It wasn't

me. I swear. I locked it, I know I did. I always do.'

They looked at each other. 'Another target?' Romana said.

'But they needed to take control of a corporeal form to interact with the

environment.'

Romana shrugged. 'What about all the humans?'

'Far too complicated.'

'What are you talking about?' They talked like I wasn't even there, but I

needed some sort of explanation. Any sort of explanation. I didn't want to

be afraid anymore.

'Kirsty,' said the Doctor, putting an arm around my shoulders and

leading me firmly away from the dolls. 'I think from now on things are

going to get a bit quieter.'

I didn't shrug him off, but asked, 'How do you know?'

'Well,' he said. 'I'm terribly clever.'

'Oh.'

He shot a glance behind him then leaned down to whisper in my ear.

'So's Romana.' He gave me a solid nod. 'But don't tell her I said so.'

'Look,' said the teddy bear, not able to meet Romana's stern gaze. 'There's

obviously been some sort of mistake.' It had a fixed expression on its face,

couldn't even blink its beady eyes. Yet Romana was struck by the way it

hung its head, the way it looked away, the way it seemed to want a hug.

'That's very true,' said Romana. 'Doctor!' She glanced at the door. It

was dark outside and she had, technically, broken in. But since she was

following the teddy bear at the time, she didn't feel at all guilty about it.

The door to the sweet shop tinkled and the Doctor walked through

holding a sailor doll in one hand and the doll in the sparkling blue dress

in the other. 'Look who I found loitering about outside,' he said.

'Look who I found looting inside,' said Romana, nodding at the teddy

bear. The Doctor tutted and put down the two dolls next to the teddy bear.

They glanced at each other, looking ever-so-slightly guilty.

'Well done, Romana. A fair cop, I'd say. Now how about getting the co-

ordinates of where this transmission is coming from?'

'Right,' she said, and dashed out of the door, towards the TARDIS.

The Doctor turned to the three toys and looked at them severely, meeting

their plastic eyes one by one.

'You,' he said carefully, 'are thieving confectionery. Not to mention

causing several rather dangerous spatial shifts in the local environment.

Now, are you trying to take over the Earth or just blow it up?'

The teddy bear looked at his feet, hands held behind his back trying

to hide his chocolate-covered paw. Finally he looked at the Doctor and

sniffled, 'I'm only eight years old!'

The Doctor looked a little uncomfortable. 'You're children?' he asked.

The teddy bear stared at him. 'We like the sweets,' he said quietly.

'Well,' said the Doctor, and he seemed not quite sure what to say next.

'Well,' he repeated, 'don't do it again. Or we'll be telling your parents.' The

door opened, the Doctor didn't look up. 'Romana, where are they from?'

'Elden Twelve,' she said, rushing back in. 'And the TARDIS is all set to

land right in the middle of their habitation block.'

'No!' squeaked the doll. 'You don't have to tell our parents! We promise

not to do it again.'

'Are you sure?' asked the Doctor gravely.

The doll and the teddy bear and the little sailor nodded meekly, plastic

eyes cast to the ground, hands held behind their backs.

'All right then,' said the Doctor. 'Off you go, and put yourselves back on

the shelf first.'

Romana held the door open and the trio trooped outside, three toys

walking down a darkened street and all looking a little ashamed of

themselves. 'Remember,' called the Doctor. 'We know where you live!'

Romana shut the door and jumped up onto the counter, swinging her

legs. 'Are you sure we can trust them?' she asked.

'Oh, it's not as though they were raving megalomaniacs hoping for a

spot of genocide, is it?' His hand ducked into the jar of sherbet lemons

and he planted one in his mouth and started sucking. 'I suppose,' he said

thoughtfully, 'that you were a perfectly well-behaved child.'

'Naturally,' said Romana. Then she stuck out her tongue at him and he

smartly planted a sherbet lemon on it before striding out of the shop.

It had been a quiet day. Good quiet. The. shadows had been still when

they were supposed to be still and any noise that I heard had been easily

identified. I wasn't afraid any more.

I didn't expect to see them again, but the next week at five past four the

Doctor and Romana walked into the shop and straight over to the dolls. I

let them be. I wasn't sure who they were or what they did, but I did know

that they had been right about the noises.

A few minutes later the Doctor came to the counter.

'Everything all right here?' he asked.

'Great,' I said, and meant it.

He nodded, smiled, turned to go.

'Here,' I said, picking up one of the large red yoyos that sat in a box on

the counter. 'Just a thank you.'

The Doctor caught the toy neatly in one hand, then proceeded to walk

the dog like a pro. He grinned mischievously, and then followed Romana

out the door, the bell tinkling behind them.

Relativity

Michael Montoure

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor, with ACE

She stood by *the* nothing at the end of the lane and tried to make herself

see it.

It was in an empty yard where a house once stood. There were still

blackened remains, exposed foundations. No one had built anything else

on that lot, not ever. Evan had lived there once, but that wasn't why they

were there.

He paced round the square of flattened grass, one hand raised, running

fingers over invisible walls.

'You can't see it, can you?' Evan said, smiling a little sadly.

Rebecca reached out a hand, felt nothing.

'Come here.' He stepped forward and reached for her hand. His touch

felt electric as he pulled her near.

'Close your eyes,' he said. 'Can you hear it?'

She wondered if his eyes were closed as well. 'No.'

'Kind of a rising and falling sound. Like thunder, over and over, very

quiet and very far away.' His voice was fast and breathless, like a small

child's. 'You can't hear it?'

She let out the breath she hadn't known she had been holding in. 'No,'

she said again, eyes open.

That smile again, *the* one he didn't mean. 'It's okay,' he said. 'I'm pretty

sure I'm the only one who can.' He squeezed her hand tight, then let go.

'Suppose you could travel at *the* speed of light,' her new teacher said.

'According to special relativity, time would slow down for you. To put it

another way, suppose you had a twin...'

The boy slouching in front of her hadn't been paying attention. Now his

head snapped up and he slowly sat up straight.

'... and your twin stayed here on Earth while you went on your trip.

Einstein tells us that while you're gone, many years might pass for your

twin, and the two of you would no longer be the same age. Your twin might

die of old age... '

The boy slammed his textbook shut, causing heads to turn, even the

teacher's. Someone laughed. Most people didn't.

'Ah,' the teacher said. 'I'm sorry, Evan. I didn't think.'

'Just don't,' the boy said, and he gathered his belongings, got up and

walked out. The teacher didn't stop him, and the other students acted like

they hadn't seen. Like this happened every other day.

'As I was saying,' said the teacher when Evan had gone.

Rebecca turned to *the* girl next to her and whispered, 'What was that all

about?'

'Oh, he had a twin,' the girl whispered back. 'But he died a long time

ago.' She shrugged.

Someone should go after him, Rebecca thought, looking around at all the

bored students. The guy with the peroxide hair and the earrings, the girl

with the golden curls and condescending smile, the quiet girl at the back

dressed in all black and grey - no one would look her in the eye. They sat

listening to the teacher, pretending they understood.

Rebecca grabbed her books and ran.

'It must be hard,' she said. 'Losing someone like that.'

It seemed a strange start to a first conversation. Like there was a scene

missing. Conversations with Evan would often feel like that.

'He's not lost,' Evan said distantly. 'I know exactly where he is.' He

looked back towards the classroom. 'I bet they told you he's dead.'

She nodded.

Evan shrugged. 'They're wrong. I'd feel it if he was. I know everyone

thinks I'm -' He stopped. Looked at her closely.

She hadn't even noticed him before today. He wasn't tall, didn't play

sport, wasn't even that good-looking. So she didn't know why her cheeks

were burning when he looked at her like that.

'I know you from somewhere,' he said. He took a step closer. 'Don't I?'

Years later, safe and warm in her attic bedroom during a snowstorm,

curled together under a quilt her grandmother had made for them, Evan

said, 'I *did* know you. That first time we met, I recognised you. Just... not

from the past, that's all. Do you believe me?'

She answered him with a kiss. She'd believed everything else.

They walked home together after school almost every day. People were

starting to talk. Crazy Euan's *got* himself a *girlfriend.* He didn't seem to notice.

Not them, not even her. Let them talk.

Often, they'd walk past the patch of nothing on the ground, and he'd

stare at it for a while. Sometimes they'd talk about it. Sometimes not.

She did start to notice strange things. The square of slightly flattened

grass, like something had sat there recently. More than once, leaves and

newspapers blew around it at right angles. And the light inside that square

always fell from the sky at a winter slant, no matter what time of year it

really was.

'It's getting fainter,' he said. 'I can just barely see it now. I thought -' He

shook his head, looking back at the burned-out house.

'You can tell me,' she told him, taking his hands in hers. 'What happened

that night. I want to know.'

'Some day, yeah.' He smiled. 'You're the only one who doesn't think I'm

crazy. Want to hold on to that a while longer.'

He kissed her cheek, so lightly she almost wasn't sure it had happened.

He'd never done it before. She put a hand up to her face, trying to feel

some trace of it, but it had happened and was gone, like whatever had

stood here.

There were sounds in the house. Footsteps: slow, fast, slow. Scratches like

rats in the walls. And now the sound that made him want to bury his head

in the pillow - a sound like someone eating an apple.

'James, are you asleep?' he whispered.

James was seven years old, just an hour younger than Evan. Their mum

said they weren't identical, because James liked different things. They had

different clothes and different toys and different wallpaper in their rooms.

Mum also said that there was no way James could hear his whispers, from

over in his own room. But sometimes he did. Sometimes Evan could hear

him answer.

Not this time. Nothing but the apple sound.

The sound made him want to pull the blankets tight up over his head,

but it kept on and he had to know what it was. He got up and hesitated just

a moment, hand stretched out to the doorknob, and then opened it and

stepped out into the hall.

The light switch didn't work.

Dim light, cool and green, came from further up the hall.

The hall always looked wrong anyway. The angles never met right, the

walls seemed to lean in or away from you, and now it was so much worse.

He felt sick, and the sounds were getting louder the closer he got to his

parents' room. His insides screamed at him to turn back.

There was a man. Standing over his parents' bed, reaching down to their

sleeping faces. Doing something to them, something he couldn't quite see.

It looked up. It wasn't a man. Too many eyes glittered under its cowl, it

grinned with too many teeth. The hand it lifted away from Mum's face had

too many fingers. One finger raised to all those lips.

Sssshhh, the gesture said.

Please stand by, a voice like static whispered inside Evan's head. Out-of-

sequence biodata sample. Offspring next in sequence subsequent to *progenitor* sample.

Stand by.

Evan backed out the door, reaching blindly for the doorframe to keep

from falling. Bad dream, he told himself. Bad dream, *wake* up, *wake up* -

It reached out for him. The distance looked all wrong, the room

suddenly doll's house small - that thing didn't seem to move, but was

right next to him, all those fingers curling around his throat. Evan froze,

screwed his eyes shut

'Oi, ratbag.'

Evan's eyes snapped open, just in time to see the woman in the hall

swing the fireplace poker.

The thing fell hard, releasing him. The woman reached past its falling

body for Evan. 'Come on!' she said, and grabbed his hand.

On the back of her jacket, bright colours; the word 'Ace' like a sign

leading to safety. That was her name. He knew that, the way you just know

things when you're dreaming. She had run away from home. And she'd

never stopped running.

'Which way?' she called back to him, but he couldn't answer. His throat

was sore where the thing had held him.

They ran down hallways stretching out forever in every direction. The

house felt like it was coming apart.

There. Ahead of them, dusting down his coat with his hands, calm in

the centre of it all.

'Ah, Ace, there you are. You've found a friend, I see.'

Evan looked up at him. He was a small man, dark hair curling out from

under a tan hat, and he had a smile that should have been reassuring but

wasn't. His eyes were -

Evan suddenly thought of his grandfather. He'd only met the man once,

in hospital, just before he died. He'd been everywhere, fought in wars, had

five kids, built this house with his own hands, seen so much, and Evan had

thought if he looked in those eyes too long it would all come spilling out.

This man had eyes like that. The Doctor. He'd just stepped out of Mum

and Dad's bedroom. The room they'd just run from, ahead of them up the

corridor. Evan found his voice. 'My mum and dad -'

'Yes,' the Doctor said, closing the door. 'You don't want to go in there.'

'Are they -'

Yes. I'm afraid they are.' The Doctor crouched down and looked Evan in

the eye. 'What's important right now is that we get you out of here. Both

of you. You do have a twin brother, yes?'

Evan nodded. 'James.'

The walls were shifting now, pulsing, breathing. He heard timbers

creaking, plaster cracking and falling.

The Doctor looked up and scowled. 'No time,' he muttered. He put his

hands on Evan's shoulders. 'Listen to me. This house was built on a crack

in time, about thirty years across.' Seeing Evan's expression, he said, 'It

doesn't matter. The point is, you and your brother grew up here, you have

a connection, I need you to use it. I need you to find him.'

'How?'

'Trust me,' the Doctor said quietly, and put a finger to Evan's forehead.

'I don't... How do I... Oh, is that... That's the house. It's so small...' Evan stopped, staring into the distance. 'There. He's downstairs. I see him, but... the walls are gone, he's... No. That's me, having a picnic in the night,

I'm talking to someone, a girl. And I've got so old -'

'So then what happened?' asked Rebecca.

Evan looked almost annoyed. 'Nothing happens after anything. Everything's always happening now,' he sighed. 'I don't know how to explain it any better than that.'

She squeezed his shoulder, passed him the bottle of fizz. He took another swallow.

It wasn't like she believed him or anything. She was just going along with it for the sake of hearing the story, of maybe figuring out what was really bothering him. The things he was talking about - they just couldn't happen.

'Sorry,' he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. 'Not much of a birthday. You should have had a party.'

Rebecca shrugged. 'That's what everyone else does.' She pulled him close. 'I want to spend it with you. And I want to hear this. However you want to tell it.'

He nodded, looking up to where the second floor would have been, to

where his younger self had looked back at him. 'I found James's room,'

he said. 'There was one of those things in there, holding him. The Doctor

pulled me out of the room, slammed the door shut, and made -'

He stopped and frowned. 'Made the whole house shift, so it was outside

the room and we were inside. Something like that. I don't know. We

barricaded the door, and Ace had some kind of chain ladder in her bag,

and we got out through the window. It was easy. Like they planned this.

Like they did this all the time.'

He sounded so sure, so convincing. It was a good thing she was the one

with the level head, the one who could help him sort out what was real and

what wasn't.

At least, she was fairly sure she was. She reached for the bottle again.

'So if you both got out of the house,' she asked, taking a drink, 'what

happened to James?'

'They need both of you,' the Doctor said. 'Genetically identical, raised

on the time fissure - they can use the link between you, study your

differences, figure out how to exist here. They're not just going to just go

home quietly.'

He strode out into the yard. Ace and the two boys struggled to keep up.

'They're gonna come back, you mean?' said Ace.

'Correct,' the Doctor said, with a drawn-out burr. 'That house lets them come and go as they please between dimensions.'

'So how do we stop it?"

The Doctor stopped, smiled darkly at her. 'Burn it,' he said.

She grinned. Then she saw how Evan was looking at her and the grin faded. 'Yeah, all right,' she said. 'Meet you back at the TARDIS.'

'Hurry.' He started off again.

Evan took James's hand. 'You okay?' he asked. James hadn't said a word.

Evan joked sometimes about being his big brother. Moments like this, he

took it seriously. James nodded, eyes wide.

The Doctor led them to a tall blue box, stood on the grass outside the house. He unlocked *the* door and ushered them inside.

A huge expanse of white on white, a great control bank at its centre.

A spaceship! Like in all James's comic books and TV shows. James ran forward, the Doctor joining him at the controls. Evan stayed at the doorway, watching them. After a moment the Doctor noticed him.

'I have to take you somewhere safe,' the Doctor said.

'Another planet?' James asked, his voice high and excited. He was practically bouncing. Mum was right, they *were* different.

'No. James, don't be stupid.' Evan was freezing near the door, but he couldn't make himself take another step inside. 'Where *are* you taking us?'

The Doctor didn't look up from his controls. 'Well, not so much a

question of where as *when,'* he muttered.

Evan shook his head. 'No,' he said, backing out of the door. This was

too much.

'But this is so cool,' said James, reaching for the controls.

The Doctor idly batted his hand away with the tip of his umbrella. 'No?'

he asked Evan.

Evan bolted.

He heard the dull thump of an explosion as Ace ran out of the house. The

green windows turned red and orange. He felt nothing, just watched the

flames curling around what used to be his home. Things like this didn't

happen. He tried to tell himself it had to be a dream. His breath was like

steam in the night air and he was barefoot in the wet grass. No dream was

ever this sharp and cold.

'Come on,' Ace said, catching up to him.

'I can't-'

'Those things could come back. You heard the Professor.'

'They need both of us,' Evan said. 'Right? So I'm safe on my own. And

- and he's safer without me.'

'Evan, listen -'

'I can't *go in there.* I'm... not like you, all right? I'm *scared.'*

Ace looked from him to the TARDIS, where the Doctor stood framed in the doorway. Around them, on the street, lights were coming on. The explosion had woken the neighbours.

The Doctor stepped out of *the* TARDIS. 'We have to leave,' he said. 'Now.'

Ace nodded slowly, looking at Evan.

'Run,' she told him.

'It doesn't matter,' Evan said that night, finishing the last of the champagne. 'I can't see the TARDIS any more anyway. He's gone.'

She married Evan, not too many birthdays after that.

They did all right for themselves. She sold books and sometimes paintings, and Evan sold insurance. He had a knack for knowing what people would need, for seeing problems before they arose. They had a pretty little garden and a pretty little house that sometimes felt too big and empty with just the two of them in it.

Rebecca had almost forgotten the strange box that wasn't there, except on nights when she'd wake to find Evan alone on their porch with a flask of tea. He'd grin guiltily at her, they'd watch the stars for a while and then he'd follow her back up to bed. She knew other wives who had much worse to put up with.

Then came the day she came home to find him frantically clearing out

their small guest room, emptying all the boxes and clutter.

'I saw it,' he told her, and his smile was wide and almost fever-bright. 'I

saw it today, down the end of the street. Just barely, like a ghost, so I wasn't

sure at first, but it's getting brighter.'

Saw what? she almost asked. But then she knew.

'You're not helping him,' Evan's aunt scolded her. They'd come to her

house to collect the few toys and things that still remained from James's

childhood. 'He should have got this out ofhis system, moved on with his

life. We thought he'd done that when he met you.'

Rebecca just smiled and couldn't explain.

She hadn't been able to explain to her friends either. Evan had been

spotted at the DIY place, buying paint and paper for a child's bedroom.

Was she expecting? Not exactly, she'd say.

She tried to keep on with her life, tending to the bookstore, keeping one

foot in the real world. But every night she'd come home and there'd be

something new. He bought tin spaceships and robots and books online

and at jumble sales, things that he remembered James used to own. And he

would spend his evenings not with her but alone in that room, arranging

things, moving them round, never quite getting them right. He never

noticed her the times she watched from the doorway and felt like she

shouldn't come in.

He'd been a good brother, she'd think as she watched him sleep at night,

even if he was the one who couldn't face the monsters, *the* magic. Would

he make a good dad? She'd watch his chest rise and fall, wonder if she

was just encouraging him. If he'd been pretending for her all this time,

pretending to be normal, and finally it had all come crashing down.

Other nights he couldn't sleep at all, listening to the sound of distant

engines only he could hear.

Then, eventually, there was *the* night he shook her awake, his face alive

with excitement like a child on Christmas morning. 'Now?' she asked.

'Seriously?'

This is crazy, she thought as she felt about for her dressing gown. You

know it is.

But she put the questions out of her head, took his hand. They ran

outside, down the street, laughing.

She felt the night air alive with static, her whole body tingling with it.

She heard what he had always heard, the rising and falling like thunder,

over and over, very loud and very close.

They kept running, hands clasped tight together, to the end of the street,

to the blue box. To an opening door.

Outstanding Balance

Tim Lambert

An adventure of the Second Doctor, with Jamie and Zoe

'All rise for the Grand Ticket!'

Those present in the Decision Room gently levitated their egg-like bodies

until they hovered a respectful distance above the intricately patterned

carpet. Maintaining their altitude as steadily as they could, they remained

silent while the Grand Ticket floated through the room, his ceremonial

hat perched atop his wise and speckled shell. He took his place on a large

throne levitating high above the crowd and adjusted his hat to a suitably

dignified angle.

'All sit!' called the similarly adorned clerk. They all sat. 'The Subject will

riser

The Subject, a small, nervous egg-like creature, propelled himself

upwards until he was almost level with the Grand Ticket. He swallowed

hard, knowing that the outcome of these proceedings could affect his

whole life. He was almost certain he would lose his position as a Class B

Ticketer.

'Ticketer Gento,' the Grand Ticket began solemnly, 'you are accused

of failing to secure vehicles in relation to unpaid parking fines on three

separate occasions. We will now hear your Excuses.'

'Excuses! Excuses!' chattered the gathering below, eager to wallow in Gento's misery.

'My first Excuse,' said Gento, trying to meet the Grand Ticket's stern gaze, 'is that the vehicle in question has an unconventional means of propulsion.'

'How so?' asked *the* Grand Ticket, scratching at a small white blemish on his shell.

'Rather than hovering, it fades from the very air. Our gravity clamps have no effect - it just leaves them behind.'

The Grand Ticket bounced up and down in consternation. 'I find this Excuse to be very weak, Ticketer Gento. The transgressor is a serial offender and his mode of transport - a TARDIS - is well documented in our records.' He peered at Gento with harsh, beady eyes. 'I trust your second Excuse does not include such amateur mistakes.'

'No, Your Grandness, it does not. I do however have supporting video evidence.'

The Grand Ticket sniffed through *the* smooth hole at the centre of his face. 'Very well.' He lowered himself to near the level of the crowd, as a vivid three-dimensional illusion faded into life above him. The crowd ooh-ed with anticipation.

The illusion solidified into *the* blue, rectangular shape of *the* Doctor's TARDIS. It was in what appeared to be a cave, with walls formed from

smooth, cold, mineral nodules and stalactites. They were lit with an eerie

green glow by a still pool of water nearby.

The door opened and the Doctor stepped out, wearing a faintly ridiculous

fur coat and a blue woolly hat. His face was about the only part of him

exposed to the elements, and that was wearing a wary scowl.

'Yes, well all right then,' he shouted through the door. 'I suppose I am a

bit overdressed. You may as well come out now.' He stood aside and began

clumsily unbuttoning his coat. 'Oh, dear,' he said to himself.

A young man wearing a kilt followed him out of the TARDIS, with a

cheerful girl in a glittering catsuit close behind. He stood with his hands

on his hips, taking stock of the scene. 'Oh, aye. It's really cold out here all

right. I shoulda worn two kilts, isn't that right Zoe?'

'Oh, definitely.' She was distracted by something on the other side of the

cave. 'Jamie, did you see something move just then?'

'I'm nae sure. What do you reckon, Doctor?'

'Well, being so warm this far underground must involve some sort of

volcanic process,' said the Doctor, thinking aloud. 'Who knows what we'll

find down here?' He pulled off his hat and fiddled with it tensely.

'It's coming towards us!' said Zoe, backing against the TARDIS's frame

as the shape moved ever closer.

'Everybody back inside!' shouted the Doctor.

'No, wait,' said Zoe, moving nervously towards the shadow. 'It's a cat!'

'So it is!' Jamie laughed. 'A plain old tabby cat!'

'Stop!' commanded the Grand Ticket. The image above him froze

accordingly, showing an ordinary ginger tabby cat with one white paw

lifted mid-step. 'What is this creature?'

'That is me,' said Gento, 'as seen by holographic inference. Or rather,

I'm inside its belly, controlling it.'

'A robotic simulacrum?'

'I needed a means of entering the offender's vehicle, and our records

show he's fond of Felis silvestra *catus.'*

The Grand Ticket nodded sagely. 'Continue.'

'Oh, he's adorable!' Zoe enthused, as she stroked the cat under its chin.

The cat purred appreciatively and rubbed its bony head against her shin.

'But what's he doing down here?'

'I don't know,' said the Doctor, pacing warily in the gloom away from

the pool. 'Jamie, could you fetch my torch please?'

The cat followed Jamie into the TARDIS, with the point of view following

it through the doors and into the TARDIS interior. The audience in the

Decision Room gasped in astonishment when they saw how big, bright

and glaringly white it was. The Grand Ticket had of course seen it all

before, and was careful to show little interest.

'Hey!' Jamie shouted back to the Doctor. 'That cat's following me!'

Yes, well never mind him for now, Jamie.' The Doctor replied. 'Just

hurry with that torch. There's something very interesting over here.'

'Och, I don't like the sound of that,' said Jamie to the cat. The cat merely

stared at him unblinkingly.

Jamie disappeared into the rear of the console room, leaving the cat

alone. It sprang nimbly onto the console and stepped carefully around the

levers and switches, examining each one briefly as it went. Eventually, it

stopped at a plain black tube protruding from the panel. The cat turned its

head to one side and gripped the protuberance with its teeth, twisting it

clockwise to slowly unscrew it from its socket.

'Found it!' Jamie announced from the back room. The cat left the tube

half-unscrewed and leapt down to the floor in the blink of an eye. It sat

there, watching Jamie nonchalantly as he walked past holding a large,

heavy battery-powered torch.

Gento's plan to use the cat to completely remove the tube was thwarted

again when Zoe entered the TARDIS just as Jamie was leaving. They

squeezed past each other in the doorway with a laugh.

'I'll hold the fort,' said Zoe. She looked down at the cat. 'What's your

story then, I wonder?' She picked it up quite abruptly and carried it swiftly

out of the console room, further into the TARDIS. 'We'd better get you checked out for fleas, hadn't we?'

The cat scrambled at her shoulder in an attempt to break free, but Zoe's hold was firm.

The illusion dissolved above the watching crowd. 'Excuse! Excuse!' They bayed.

'There is nothing of relevance in the missing section. The next excerpt takes place some time later,' said Gento. The illusion faded back into view, this time showing the console room again.

The Doctor and Jamie had returned, and were breathlessly running around the six sides of the console, the Doctor in particular looking very agitated.

'Come on, Doctor. Let's get out of here!' urged Jamie, following him around like a slightly annoying shadow.

'What's happened?' asked Zoe, who was being ignored by everyone in the room apart from the cat, which was glowering at her sullenly.

'We're in a volcano!' Jamie shouted at her.

'Well, let's get going then!' she cried, caught up in the hysteria.

The Doctor was still racing around the controls, twisting dials and tapping meters. 'I can't just go,' he said. 'I have to stop the lava flow reaching the Ovoid city!'

'Ovoid?' asked Zoe.

'Aye, Ovoid,' said Jamie, who had decided at last to stand out of the

Doctor's way. 'Funny wee egg-creatures. That's what the Doctor brought

us here to see.'

'Well, we're never going to see them if I don't get the TARDIS inbetween

the lava and their city!' The Doctor slapped the console with his palm

repeatedly. 'Why won't you go, you blasted machine?'

He was startled into taking a step back by the cat, which unexpectedly

launched itself at the panel he was working on, popping up between his

arms. 'Oh, Zoe!' he remonstrated.

'Well I can't put it outside now, not with all that lava coming!'

'Hey, what's it doing now?' Jamie interrupted.

The cat was screwing the tube that it had previously tried to remove back

into its socket. Working quickly with its jaw, the task was complete before

anyone could react, and the central column of the TARDIS console began

to rise with a deep judder and long, promising wheeze.

'Oh, splendid!' The Doctor patted the cat on the head then, in a double

take, looked at it with great suspicion. 'What's a clever cat like you doing

here anyway?'

The illusion froze on the Grand Ticket's command. 'Your evidence appears

to be further incriminating you, Ticketer Gento. Helping the guilty

party

leave? This really won't do.'

Gento bowed himself a little before the Grand Ticket. 'With respect,

your Grandness, the Doctor was about to save the city.'

'I was aware of no such threat.'

'Then perhaps I should continue playing my recording?'

The Grand Ticket considered for a moment. 'Very well. There is still your

third Excuse to consider.' Gento saw him fingering the simple cap they

wore for announcing executions. 'Although I feel these proceedings are

now largely a formality.'

Gento said nothing. Feeling suitably cowed, he resumed playback.

'There,' said the Doctor, patting the edge of the console a touch uncertainly.

'I've materialised the TARDIS in a narrow passageway. That should block

the lava flow from reaching the city.'

'What about us?' asked a worried Zoe.

The Doctor smiled reassuringly. 'We'll be perfectly safe in here,' he said.

'Although it may get a bit warm.'

There was a heavy thud as the lava struck the TARDIS, and the resulting

jolt sent everyone staggering to the left.

'Are you sure it's safe, Doctor?' asked Zoe, moving warily away from the

large exterior doors.

The Doctor didn't answer for a moment, as he climbed down onto all fours to examine the cat more closely. 'Oh, yes. Quite safe.'

'That's a canny creature for sure,' said Jamie, joining *the* Doctor on the floor. 'If we had any mice to catch I'd say we should keep it.'

The cat looked at them both in turn with suspicious eyes.

'Did you feed him at all, Zoe?'

'Jamie, or the cat?' laughed Zoe, causing Jamie to roll his eyes theatrically.

'I gave it a saucer of milk and a bath.'

'A bath?' said the Doctor, laughing. 'Oh, I expect he didn't like that!'

He scrutinised the cat again, then stood up quickly and rushed out of the room.

'Doctor?' asked Jamie of the door that had closed behind him.

'Yes Jamie?' replied the Doctor, speeding back through the door as rapidly as he had left. He was carrying a bowl of something.

'What are you up to?' asked Jamie as he watched the Doctor place the bowl in front of the cat. The cat sniffed at his offering suspiciously.

'They're very clever creatures, the Ovoids,' the Doctor said, circling stealthily around the cat. 'Very clever, but terribly bureaucratic. As a matter of fact I was meaning to pay off some outstanding parking fines with them while I was here.'

The cat's ears pricked up as he said this, and its tail flicked once, then froze. It looked into the dish again, examining the half-dozen or so

diamonds that lay within.

'Go on,' said the Doctor. 'Everyone knows that cats love to eat

diamonds.'

'But Doctor...' began Zoe.

'Now, Zoe,' said the Doctor, solemnly. 'Don't put him off his food.'

They were all watching the cat now, so Gento made its tail curl up

happily as it reached its head down to the diamonds and pretended to eat

them. The cat lapped them up one by one with its rough, tacky tongue

and swallowed them into a compartment next to Gento. After finishing, it

looked at the Doctor and let out a short, pronounced mew.

'How cute!' Zoe enthused.

'Yes,' said *the* Doctor, ignoring her. 'That's what I thought.'

Zoe dropped her smile as she realised she was missing something. 'So

hold on - this cat is controlled by Ovoids?'

'Possibly,' replied the Doctor, biting his lower lip thoughtfully. 'It's often

hard to tell exactly what they're up to.'

The cat padded across to the doors and pawed at the left one with

another meow, this time more insistent.

The illusion dissolved for a final time, and all the Ovoids present in the

Decision Room readjusted their positions accordingly. The Grand Ticket

began to rise to a more authoritative height, preparing to make his

Decision.

There was an awful silence, which Gento was afraid to break, knowing that doing so would set the wheels in motion for his Decided fate. He cleared his throat. 'The diamonds I was given more than cover the penalties owed.' He looked up in awe at the Grand Ticket towering above him. 'In fact,' he continued, 'I have used a portion of them to pay the fines on the offender's behalf.'

The Grand Ticket snorted. 'Very irregular,' he said.

There was another agonising pause, during which even the excited crowd below didn't dare whisper speculation.

'But not illegal,' the Grand Ticket conceded. 'What did you do with the rest of the diamonds?'

Gento felt emboldened a little by this almost positive response. 'I purchased a season permit for the offender, so he won't incur any fines the next time he visits, Your Grandness.'

'Oh, for the Holy Egg's sake,' the Grand Ticket grumbled, causing waves of shocked murmuring below. 'I hope you can get by on your Class B salary, Ticketer Gento. Case dismissed!' His throne plummeted to floor level and sped out of the room, sending the Decision-starved audience scattering out of his way.

Once in the Decision Vestibule, he hopped out of his throne and rubbed his sore, oval behind. 'I think I need more cushions on that, Pocka,' he

said to his assistant, who was removing his ceremonial garb and folding

it carefully away.

'You need to relax a little more,' Pocka replied. 'Have you tried that new

sauna near tunnel 8II? Apparently it's all-natural heating.'

The Grand Ticket's eyes narrowed, and he snatched his jacket from

Pocka with mild irritation. 'Is that so?'

Back inside the Decision Room, Gento smiled to himself and squeezed the

one remaining diamond tightly in his slender, bird-like hand.

The Last Thing You Ever See

Richard Goff

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Harry and Sarah Jane

Hanging from a large, multi-coloured scarf was a large, multi-coloured

Time Lord. Clinging grimly to his long legs was a diminutive, pale - and

increasingly paler - Sarah Jane Smith.

The scarf was looped tentatively around a fire extinguisher set into the

wall above them. Below them was a 2oo-foot drop, deep into *the* engines

of the space station.

'Hang on,' boomed *the* Doctor. Til try and haul myself up.'

Sarah shivered. This may be the future, but they don't make floors like

they used to.'

That floor gave way intentionally. This was no accident.'

Sarah gasped as the scarf slipped a little again. 'Are you sure this is a

good idea?'

'Well, I'm open to suggestions.'

Sarah stared into *the* drop below and swallowed. 'You carry on. You're

doing a great job.' Need something to distract me, she thought. 'Is it me, or are

we stuck with space stations at the moment?'

'That's all there is in this part of the galaxy - practically for thousands

of years.'

With a grunt *the* Doctor shifted himself up the scarf - but the effort shook

Sarah, who began to slide down his legs. 'Doctor - Doctor!' She could feel

the panic light forest fires inside her. And the doubts whispering to her:

maybe everything would be a lot easier if she just let herself fall. After all,

it would be over in seconds, and this hurt, it hurt so much, and she was so

scared... Her grip slipped further as the Doctor moved up his scarf, closer

to the corridor they'd been walking down when the floor had suddenly

given way. She closed her eyes so tightly her head began to throb.

With one last lurch the Doctor hauled himself up to safety. The effort

of it shook Sarah's hands loose and she screamed; she'd been hanging

there too long, was too tired to hold on with just one hand and before

she knew it, despite almost wishing it, she was astonished to find herself

plummeting down, down towards the bristling steel of *the* machinery

below.

Harry Sullivan was in hospital.

That was not unusual in itself. At least, it seemed like a hospital: the grey

corridors, *the* air of brisk calm. The raw, sour smell of antiseptic singed

his nostrils.

What was unusual was that instead of doing his rounds he was strapped

into a chair. Two men were standing in front of him. Both wore medical

scrubs and were masked, as if for surgery. Both wore glasses. As Harry squinted at them for some sense of who they were, he realised neither had eyes behind their glasses, merely blank, featureless skin.

Both men held sharp, vicious instruments in each hand. Harry stared at the instruments, and couldn't stop staring, knowing precisely what each might be used for. His own eyes bulged as the two men leant over to him to make their first incisions.

The Doctor immediately lunged at a control panel next to the door, his sonic screwdriver fizzing at it. Then he unhooked his scarf and quickly fashioned it into a lasso as Sarah, arms flailing, shot back up towards him.

The Doctor flung the scarf out towards Sarah. It snagged on one of her flailing arms, and he tugged her back to safety. She landed at his feet in a crumpled and astonished heap.

'I'll never sneer at knitwear again,' she gasped. 'How...?'

'I persuaded the ship's computer that the under-floor air conditioning was actually the anti-gravity drive and rerouted a huge amount of power.

The air conditioning wafted you all the way back up.'

'Oh,' Sarah nodded, determined not to cry. 'Obvious, really.'

'I thought so.' He gave a wolfish grin. 'There's something funny going on here, Sarah, and I don't like it. I don't like it at all. Come on.' He

plunged through the door into the next corridor, so fast she had to run to

catch him up. 'If there's one thing I can't stand,' he said, 'it's floors with

murderous intentions. Takes all the fun out of an afternoon walk.'

This new corridor seemed shorter than the rest. Sighing, and aching,

Sarah trailed after him - before immediately bumping into him as he

stopped abruptly.

'Owl' she protested.

'Shh!' he chided. 'Listen...'

Distantly, a lingering scream. Sarah's mouth fell open in horror. A

lingering scream with a familiar quality.

'That was Harry!' she said. 'Wasn't it?'

'Sarah,' rumbled the Doctor, 'Don't bother me with questions. Bother

me with answers. What if all the scientists in the universe loped around

asking me questions all day? What would have been discovered?'

'Doctor, that was Harry.'

He looked at her solemnly. 'I know. But from which direction?'

Sarah pointed straight up the corridor, which didn't seem as long as

she'd thought: they'd soon find him. 'That way.'

They started to run; it really wasn't far to the end of the corridor at all.

Sarah tutted. '"Take a quick look round," he said. "Might as well, as we've materialised," he said. "How can we ever be late for anything," he said,

"when we're travelling through time...?"'

The scream again. The blood drained from Sarah's face. 'I've never

heard somebody scream like that. What are they *doing* to him?'

'Harry?' called the Doctor. 'Harry!' They were almost at the end of the

corridor.

Sarah briefly looked back - and yelped in horror. The door they'd just

come through, supposedly at the other end of the corridor, was almost on

top of them. 'Doctor, the walls are closing in - look!'

The Doctor stared.

'We're going to be crushed to death!'

Now Harry was somewhere else. Unsettled by the change, he couldn't

focus, he couldn't make sense. Was it a doctor's? No — an optician's.

He watched as the optician attended to the patient just before Harry in

the queue. The optician gently held the patient's chin, tilted his head this

way and that, peering into the holes where the man should have eyes.

Then, carefully and deliberately, he plunged his fingers into the spaces.

Then his whole hand, then more and more of his arm... His whole arm was

lost inside the man's head. Harry couldn't look away.

The patient was writhing in discomfort. Silently, *the* optician pushed

his own head into *the* eye spaces. When he had got his whole head in, he

gave a supple dive and disappeared into the patient's eyes completely. A

flick of neat black shoes and he was gone. The patient's head bulged here

and there from side to side, bent out of shape by whatever had forced itself

inside.

Harry watched, horrified. Momentarily his view was blocked by someone

standing in front of him. His eyes adjusted; it was another optician. The

optician smiled politely.

Then her fingers reached towards his eyes.

The door at each end of the corridor was almost on top of them. The

Doctor worked frantically at a control panel, trying to find something that

would stop the doors. His fingers moved so fast they blurred, but the look

on his face betrayed what he was thinking. They didn't stand a chance.

Quite without warning, the Doctor guffawed. 'Of course!'

Sarah leaned over to see what he had seen. Flickering on a small screen

above the controls was a skeletal plan of the ship, two bright red dots

showing their own position. A third, way off in front of them, must be

Harry, trapped and in considerable pain. Helpfully, the screen showed the

way they had to go to find him and, less helpfully, the corridor about to

crush them where they now stood.

'What?' she said.

'This is the Desolii!' laughed the Doctor. 'The most haunted ship in

the galaxy! I've always wanted to visit! Do you think they sell postcards?'

Jubilantly, the Doctor patted *the* walls. 'Nobody ever gets out alive! The

Desolii! What marvellous luck!'

Sarah eyed him witheringly. 'We're about to be crushed to death on a

galactic Flying Dutchman,' she said. 'And you're dancing a jig?'

There was barely space for them both to stand; Sarah felt herself

squeezed against the Doctor's heavy coat and scarf.

'Oh, don't worry,' The Doctor waved a hand airily, hitting a wall in

the process. 'Ow. The company who made the ship got so annoyed with

everyone telling stories about it that they published the secret code for this

class of space station that instantly resets all its systems. Everyone knows

it, it's like a legend among those who trawl the cosmos, passed down

between us in case we're ever lucky enough to get here... '

Sarah's face was pressed against him now, the wall calmly shoving

against the back of her head. 'I like a good ghost story,' she said into the

fabric of his coat. 'But. What's. The. Code?'

The Doctor paused, big eyes looking down at her. 'I've quite forgotten.'

'Doctor!'

'Five slash three slash three?' he said, attacking *the* controls frantically.

'No, that's the door code for my laboratory at UNIT.' He tried again.

'3.1415? No... Whitehall 1212? No...'

Sarah couldn't speak she was so tightly pressed against him. Her head

was swimming, colour patterns kaleidoscoping in front of her eyes.

'Got it!' she heard the Doctor say, as if from very far away. 'Dominion

Corporadon code 158!'

Instantly, with what Sarah imagined to be a slight whoosh of

disappointment, the doors began to recede. She collapsed, away from the

Doctor, her whole body groaning. But she hadn't forgotten Harry, and

looked up at *the* screen that showed the map of the ship. Her poor insides

turned over.

'Doctor... '

'What?'

You did say there were just the three of us onboard, didn't you? That

there wasn't any other life around?'

'Not so much as a used tea-bag.'

Sarah pointed down the corridor. 'So what's... that?'

The darkness had overwhelmed Harry. He was in what appeared to be a

large room. Feeling about with his hands, he felt tubes, wires and cables.

Without warning, light poured over him. Briefly blinded, he turned

towards its source, squinting. He seemed to be looking through a large,

rather beautiful window, colours painted in circles at its centre - stained

glass perhaps? Was he in some sort of cathedral? How had he got here?

Looking out, he could see limitless blue sky. Must be a very tall building.

The building suddenly shook underneath him. Oh heck, *now* I'm *at the*

heart of an earthquake, thought Harry as he was flung from one end of the

cramped dark room to the other. Cables and wires gave off flashes and

sparks as he crashed into them.

When the earthquake stopped and Harry found his feet again, he looked

out the window and turned pale from shock.

Outside the building there were giants. Huge people, hundreds of times

bigger than Harry, walking between huge trees. There were hundreds of

the savage-looking people - far too many for him to count.

And it was then, as the building shuddered again, as the coloured circles

inside other coloured circles on the window took on a familiar shape, that

he realised. He looked down, out of the window, and saw his own, giant

arms and hands. Somehow he was trapped behind his own eyes. He yelled,

he screamed, but he couldn't make himself heard.

He pressed himself against the large window and sobbed.

The robot walking gracefully down the corridor towards them appeared to

be made out of glass. Light spun off its shoulders, all manner of colours

fluttering and sparkling-turquoise, scarlet, azure. As it drew closer, Sarah

stared into its eyes. They danced with intelligence. It stopped in front of

them, straightened an invisible tie and regarded them quizzically. 'Terribly

nice to meet you both, but may I ask what you're doing here?'

Sarah and The Doctor gawped. 'That's quite a... cut-glass accent,'

stammered Sarah.

The robot inclined its head slightly as if in agreement. And then it let out

a perfectly polite little laugh, like the ticking of a clock. 'Funny old world,

isn't it? My name is Henry,' he said. 'May I ask again what you're doing

here, if it doesn't put you out?'

The Doctor grinned. 'We could ask you the same question.'

'Tiresome thing really, but I've been activated in response to your

movements. I investigate the unusual. Someone has to, I dare say?'

'What would be unusual on the Space Station Desolii?'

'Ah,' Henry shimmered thoughtfully. 'Good question. Ghosts, I think.'

'Ghosts?' said the Doctor. 'Do robots believe in ghosts?'

The robot regarded them politely. 'I'm sure I couldn't say. Do you?'

'What would you do with us if we *were* ghosts?' asked Sarah.

Henry fidgeted apologetically. 'Ah. Well, neutralise you, I'm afraid.

That's my job, you see. Nothing personal, you understand. You seem

terribly decent.'

The Doctor turned to Sarah. 'I've never been so gently sentenced to death in all my lives.'

Sarah hushed him. 'Doctor, can you hear...'

'Hear what?'

'Nothing. That's just it. I can't hear Harry at all.' She ran over to the door and pressed an ear against it. 'Maybe something has taken him...'

The Doctor joined her, listening intently. 'Sarah...' he said, his voice ominous and hollow. Sarah swallowed hard. Perhaps they were too late...

'Do you like Hitchcock?' the robot chirped.

'What?' said Sarah.

'Do you like Hitchcock? Judging from your style of dress, in your time he's a famous manufacturer of moving pictures, is he not?'

Sarah looked to the Doctor, who shrugged. It was probably best to humour the machine, especially as it was pointing a gun at them.

'I suppose so,' she said. 'Why?'

'Ever seen The Trouble with Harry?'

'No.' said Sarah.

The robot hung its head. 'Oh,' it said. 'And I was going to do a joke.' It looked so sad, Sarah instinctively wanted to comfort it.

'Why?' she asked. 'What was the trouble with Harry?'

The Doctor turned large baleful eyes on her. 'He was dead, Sarah. That was the trouble with Harry.'

'Talking of which,' added the robot, regretfully, 'I really must ask you to

expire now.' Elegantly, inexorably, it began moving towards them.

Harry was facing a firing squad. He had no idea what he'd done. He struggled, desperate to explain that they'd got it wrong. There hadn't even

been a trial, for goodness' sake, there was no way he should be shot.

Then he saw the faces of the soldiers. Like the surgeons, they had no eyes; at least, not real eyes. Instead, someone had drawn eyes on their crude balloon faces - childishly, in felt-tip. Eerily, with a weird slowness,

the soldiers were each trying to locate him, the rifles in their hands describing ineffectual circles in the air.

Harry sighed. 'Look, this is silly...'

The squad of soldiers snapped their rifles round to aim at him: now they

knew precisely where he was.

'Now hang on a second, chaps, this isn't on... '

The officer was staring into the middle distance, as if waiting for someone - or something - else to give the order. Then, apparently satisfied, he squawked: 'Fire!'

With horrific clarity Harry could see the individual bullets streaking towards him. He found himself wondering where the bullets had been manufactured, wondering who had turned the lathe, wondering what they were doing now. Then all he could see was the point of one bullet in

particular, heading straight for his eyes.

At the top of her voice Sarah screamed: 'Dominion Corporation Code

158!'

The robot sighed. 'Do I look like a door? Or a kettle?'

The Doctor coughed. 'Listen, before we expire, there's something I

think you ought to know.'

The robot paused. 'We are programmed to improve our knowledge. I

should be most grateful.'

'If you're pursuing the paranormal, you ought to look in there.' He

gestured ahead of him.

'I shall take your advice, thank you. However, I simply must kill you first.

One thing at a time, eh?' The robot raised its gun.

'Ah, now,' said the Doctor. That's all very, well, but there's something

through that door that can only be described as super-paranormal.

Wouldn't you say so, Sarah? Mmm? Our instruments are attuned to that

kind of thing, you see. It's terribly clever.' The Doctor flourished his sonic

screwdriver. Sarah frowned: why was it humming?

Henry considered. 'Well, it would be nice to have the pleasure of your

company for a little longer.'

The robot flicked its fingers in front of the door in a dismissive, patrician

gesture, and the door opened.

Harry's body crashed out of the room, falling heavily onto the robot

which managed, just, to hold him. For an instant Sarah thought Harry

was dead. But then he screamed: a scream that made the senses shudder.

The robot's body shattered into a thousand fabulously glittering pieces.

'Oh drat,' it said.

Quickly the Doctor strode across to Harry, seized his face with one hand

and shone a pencil light directly into his eyes. 'Only had a split second to

destabilise its molecular structure with the sonic screwdriver. Couldn't

finish the job. Luckily, Harry's scream did *the* rest.'

Harry was yanked instantly away from the firing squad to find his eyes

staring straight into another pair of eyes. Large, questioning, eyes.

'Doctor...?' he said.

'Shrunk shrinks.'

Harry managed a grin. 'Come again?'

'That's what the crews call them. Tiny particles intended to repair

psychological malfunction. They sense crew-members' psychological

state, work their way into the mind and make their repairs. After all, it

gets lonely out here - the mobile library isn't due again for at least another

millennium.'

'You mean...' said Harry, struggling to sit up, 'these shrunk thingies

crept into my mind and started having a chimps' tea party?' He shivered,

remembering. 'Everything seemed to revolve around eyes.'

'What was *the* last thing you said, before...?'

Harry thought. 'Oh,' he said. 'I looked out at all the stars, and I said,

"What a sight!"'

The Doctor nodded. 'Shrunk shrinks could pick up on things like that, take elements from the victim's memory and set off vicious little conflagrations in *the* mind, were their programming to go haywire.'

'So,' said Sarah, 'the ship's haunted by the people who come aboard.'

'Only one thing worse than the naturally malign, Harry,' said the Doctor.

'And that's something originally benign that's gone bad.'

'Very philosophical, Doctor. How come they didn't take over your mind?'

The Doctor beamed. 'Easier to walk round a bungalow than a palace, Harry. No, I think it's like mosquitoes. There's three of you in the same room, but only one of you ends up with bites.'

Harry shook his head. 'So all those things I saw... It was all just a dream?'

The Doctor frowned. 'Just a dream in the sense that Ancient Rome was just a few buildings and some fancy speeches, Harry. It was a much more powerful "dream" than humans would ever have normally. Not that I wish to denigrate your dreams, Harry. One should never denigrate another man's dreams... '

Sarah looked mournfully at the robot. 'Poor old Henry.'

All that was left of the robot was a metal skull, with two holes where its eyes had been, on a sparse metal skeleton. It turned an unseeing, ironic

gaze on her. 'It is a bit of an inconvenience,' it said.

'He's still alive!' she exclaimed.

'It was never alive,' the Doctor told her. 'It was just a service robot with

an excessive sense of courtesy. The ship knew we weren't meant to be

aboard, and it used what it could to stop us. When the doors didn't squish

us, it used what it had left - and dipped into Harry's mind. Robots on a

deep space vessel like this are used to mimicking the crew. Helps them feel

at home, reassures them. It even looks as if it's made out of mirrors.'

'The robot's based on Harry!' laughed Sarah.

'I say, really?' asked Harry. 'That's rather neat, isn't it?'

'It'd begin to wear after a while,' muttered the Doctor, darkly.

'Doctor!' said Sarah.

'Well,' he huffed, gesturing at the remains of the robot. 'Good manners

didn't save him, did it?'

'You called him "him"!'

'Never mind that, Sarah, we should be on another space station

altogether. Preferably not a haunted one.'

'But maybe we could take him with us... you could repair him.'

'No robots in the TARDIS, Sarah - they're infuriating and smug.'

'Oh, well, we couldn't have "infuriating and smug" in the TARDIS,

could we Doctor... '

Harry looked down on the robot. He patted its shoulder awkwardly.

'Never mind, old chap. I'm sure you were a very good robot.'

'One tries, you know? One tries.'

Harry nodded. 'Quite right. Um, anything I can get you?'

But the last circuit in Henry's frame had quietly shut down. Instinctively,

Harry went to close the robot's eyes.

'Come on, Harry!'

The three of them joined hands, the Doctor letting go of Sarah to operate

the Time Ring, then grabbing her hand again. Once they'd gone, silence

fell over the Desolii, ship without rest.

Harry and Sarah were in a small cafe, just down the corridor from the

TARDIS's swimming pool. It reminded Sarah of Sergio's, her coffee shop

of choice in South Croydon. You got the feeling that whoever ran the place

had just popped out for a moment, leaving whatever you hadn't quite

realised you wanted steaming, ready, on the side.

'You see, old thing,' said Harry. 'It's like with Americans.'

Sarah hiccupped. 'Sorry?'

'You know. You think they' re the same as you because they speak the

same language. But when you get talking to them, you realise there's an

entirely different country lurking behind everything they say. It's the same

with him. You look at what he wears: a coat, a hat, a scarf. And you're fooled

into thinking he's an eccentric version of us. But he's not an eccentric

version of us: he's nothing like us, old thing. He's... alien. We don't know

what he'll do next. We can't possibly understand his responsibilities. His

moral code is on a bigger stage than ours. But sometimes I can't help

thinking it's, well, a bit lacking, really, when it comes to the small stuff.

Like you and me.'

Sarah gulped her cappuccino. 'Okay, but what's your point?'

'Well, listen, Sarah, what if you died out there? Do you really want the

last thing you ever see to be - I don't know, something with tentacles? Or

something you can't pronounce, on a world you can't hope to understand?

I mean I realise South Croydon isn't exactly a new solar system, but... isn't

it home? Isn't it what you know? Isn't it... you?'

'Those shrink things, they really got to you, didn't they?'

'Who knows how many miles we are from home, and the thing that's

most dangerous is what's in my head.' Harry shrugged. 'Thing is, old girl,

the universe turns out to be a jolly big place, and I'm just not sure I can fit

it all in.'

They barely had time to finish their drinks before a sound like tearing

machinery crashed through the ship. The TARDIS was materialising

somewhere new.

They made their way slowly back to the console room, Harry gingerly

bearing his mug of tea.

Sarah chuckled. 'Of course,' she said as they found the Doctor, fussing over the TARDIS controls, 'you do realise that a mad ship's computer babbling about people who arrived from nowhere without any visible means of transport and disappeared without trace may not necessarily help rumours about the place being haunted... '

The Doctor looked at her, suddenly solemn. 'No journey, however brief,

is without its consequences, Sarah.'

Behind him, Harry Sullivan stared into the unfathomable darkness of space.

The Shopping Trolleys of Doom

Caleb Woodbridge

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor

'Oi, wait!' I shouted, lowering my spanner from fixing a shopping trolley.

I'd been staring at the newspaper stand, each paper with flashing images

of the latest wave of spaceships heading out of the solar system, brave

explorers among the new planets. I imagined what it would be like to be a

hero out there with them, discovering new places and creatures.

And then I noticed a scruffy man slipping some bread under his grey

overcoat. My head was in the stars but my life was stuck down here on

Earth. Stopping a shoplifter was the greatest adventure I'd ever have. I

sighed as the man quickened his pace, hurrying nervously towards the

main exit of Megamart.

'Look, you really don't want to do this, mate!' I called, making my way

towards him. He slipped through *the* great glass doors and through the

tide of shoppers. As he did so, an alarm started screeching furiously.

'Oh no,' I groaned, as he broke into a run. I reached the doors to see

him haring across *the* park. As I did so, three trolleys shot past me in hot

pursuit.

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' said the trolleys in their soothingly synthesised

female tones, better suited for informing customers of special offers. As

I followed, the shoplifter dashed through the narrow space between the

cars. A number of trolleys moved out from the corner of the car park to

block the exits, rattling furiously as their engines propelled them across

the tarmac. Within moments, half a dozen trolleys had surrounded him. I

made my way cautiously over.

'Place the goods on the ground in front of you,' said one of the trolleys,

'and await security services, or reasonable force will be administered.

Thank you.' Legal disclaimers and footnotes flashed up on its information

screen as it did so.

'You'd better do what they said,' I said wearily. 'They're armed with

stun-guns, give you a nasty shock.' The Smart Trolleys had been in use for

over a year, so you'd have thought people would have learned by now. The

shoplifter reached into his pockets to remove the bread, cheese and bottle

of beer he had concealed. He laid them carefully on the ground.

'Good choice,' I said. 'Now just wait here a moment, and...'

'Place *the* goods on the ground in front of you,' said four trolleys at once,

'and await security services, or reasonable force will be administered. This

is your second warning.'

'I've done that!' shouted the man angrily. 'What more do you want?' I

was baffled: *the* trolleys ought to have registered his surrender, and only

one of them should threaten him at a time.

'Give it a moment to register,' I said, sounding more sure than I felt.

'Right,' he said, and we waited.

'This is your final warning. Please place the goods on the ground in front

of you and await security services, or reasonable force will be administered.

I repeat, this is your final warning.' This time, all the trolleys joined in.

'If all these things zap me at once, then...' the shoplifter said, trailing

off incredulously.

'Ten... nine...' the trolleys said, in their calm and mannered tones.

'Oh no, not again... emergency override!' I shouted. 'Authorisation

029364, stop all trolleys. Stop all trolleys!' But their countdown continued.

The man twisted around in panic, like a trapped animal surrounded

by dogs. I looked on helplessly. This was the third incident in as many

days...

Then, a small man in a pale cream suit stepped into the circle of trolleys.

Before I could shout at him to get out the way, he held up what appeared

to be a small metal wand. It gave off a high-pitched squeal, there was a

crackle of electricity and the trolleys died. They stood there, still,

steam

rising off them with an acrid tang, dead metal cages on wheels. The

shoplifter looked at the strange man in bewilderment.

'Thanks, mate!' he said and ran off.

'He did what?' said Mr Khan the manager. His smile remained steady but

his eyes narrowed to slits almost as thin as his moustache. I swallowed

nervously as I stood before him in his office. 'That's damaging company

property, that is!'

'Twelve combined stun blasts would hardly have done that gentleman

much good, would they now?' said the strange small man with a vaguely

Scottish accent. 'Besides, trolleys can be repaired. People can't.' He was

looking out the window, down at the gleaming store below, bustling with

hundreds of customers. Now Mr Khan's fixed smile and fierce glare swept

round to him like a spotlight.

'Megamart does of course regret any distress or inconvenience this event

may have caused you,' he said, rattling off the words automatically. He

took a deep breath. 'But that man was a thief, and we owe him no moral or

legal obligation. These Smart Trolleys don't come cheap either.'

'No obligation?' said the man in disgust. 'Killing a customer with a

shopping trolley would hardly be good for business, now, would it?'

'As I said, most *regrettable,'* said Mr Khan, shaking his head. 'But thankfully it didn't come to that. Would you like a gift voucher to compensate you for your distress?'

'You have a problem, Mr Khan,' he said. 'If you refuse to deal with it, then I will. And neither you nor Megamart will stop me.'

'Oh, honestly,' said Mr Khan, who preferred getting cross to showing weakness. This couldn't have come at a worse time. We're just launching a new project, and I'm really very busy. Look, Stevens, get back to work, I'll deal with this, er, gentleman first, and you later.'

I desperately wanted to stay, to see more of this strange man. His eyes darted around, taking everything in with a lively curiosity, emotions flitting across his face so quickly you could barely keep up. So different from all the bored, grim-faced shoppers, and from those of us caught in the daily drudge of work here. But I dared not disobey, not back then, so reluctantly headed for the door.

'Wait a moment... ' said the strange man suddenly. 'We've not been introduced. I'm the Doctor. What's your name?' He fixed me with piercing blue eyes over the top of the handle of his umbrella. But this was not an unfriendly glare. He looked at me intently but warmly.

'Joe... Joe Stevens,' I stammered.

'Mr Stevens,' he said gently, 'This isn't the first time the trolleys have

been behaving strangely, is it?' I looked at him in surprise. There had

indeed been incidents... there was the way the trolleys roamed the car

park at night in gangs, trolleys making epic and futile attempts to climb

stairs, trolleys pushing customers into walk-in freezers. I hesitated, my

attention torn between the Doctor and Mr Khan. The Doctor's firm and

steady gaze was almost enough to make me ignore Mr Khan, who was

quietly and furiously turning a bright shade of red behind him. Almost,

but not enough.

'The performance of our equipment is confidential company

information,' warned Mr Khan. 'May I remind you, this is the greatest

retail company in the world. Now whole nations shop here, every desire,

every want catered for by the Megamart brand. We make the people of this

world happy. And you dare to challenge the company!'

'I always dare to challenge megalomaniacs, monopolies and tin-pot

tyrannies, Mr Khan,' the Doctor replied. 'Especially when so many lives are

in danger. We must act at once before it's too late!'

'Too late for what exactly?' I said nervously, my eyes widening to the

size of extra-large luxury pizzas as I glanced out the window. "Cos I think

something strange is happening.'

As I had been watching, the trolleys had suddenly stopped going about

their usual business and had just frozen, stock still. The Doctor and Mr Khan came over to the window.

As we watched, the trolleys started moving again. They formed ranks, rows of them lining up at the doors in a blockade. The shoppers watched at first in silent bewilderment. They began shouting in protest and surprise as lines of trolleys swept down the aisles, bleating electronic warnings of reasonable force. Some shoppers tried to leap over them, to force their way past, only to be shot down by the stun guns. That's when the screaming began.

I watched numbly, as if it were only some lurid tale on holovision. But here it was in front of me, happening.

'The trolley uprising,' said the Doctor, 'has begun.'

'It's happening in every store, all across the country, all across the world!' Mr Khan exclaimed as he flicked between channels. Images of trolleys herding people like cattle shimmered up from the holoprojector on his desk. 'Why? Who did this? Til make them pay, believe you me!'

The Doctor regarded him coolly. 'You did this to yourselves,' he said. 'Think about it... You gave them minds of their own, and then look how you treated them. Slaves, controlled by radio signals and rules and protocols.' I thought Mr Khan might swing for him.

'I don't mean to interrupt,' I said. 'But the trolleys are getting in the lift downstairs. They'll be here any moment!' Outside, there were screams

and

the sporadic crackle of stunfire.

'You!' Mr Khan shouted pointing a fat finger in my direction. 'Activate

the emergency override!'

'I told you,' I replied. 'I tried that earlier - the override won't work!' Mr

Khan's frown twisted in several directions. It looked as if he were about to

fire me, but realised it wouldn't make any difference. He was the sort to

do it anyway.

'That was only the verbal override,' I said, thinking quickly. I knew

the robots inside out, had even become quite fond of them. Their prime

directive was to assist the customers - what could have made them turn

against everyone? But there were other ways of disabling them. 'If I could

broadcast the command by radio, they might not be able to block it out.'

'Get to it!' he ordered, pointing to the computer.

'Perhaps,' said the Doctor quietly, 'we could just talk to them. Find out

what they want. I've not had a tete-a-tete with a trolley before.'

'They want to kill us!' said Mr Khan. 'Save me *the* bleeding-heart robot

rights, Doctor, you were the one so concerned about customer safety!' He

pushed himself into a corner and tried to bury himself in paperwork.

Frantically, I reprogrammed the radio transmitter software, having to

correct dozens of little mistakes as my hands shook and hit the wrong

keys. But even if I got the thing working, it still wasn't going to succeed.

'I can send *the* signal, but the range isn't wide enough to deal with them

all!' I said. The Doctor looked over my shoulder, nodding approvingly.

'By the look of things, Megamart have a global network. If you redirect

the signal through that, you can broadcast it across *the* world,' he said.

'Let me just bypass that security protocol for you.'

The Doctor pointed the metal tool he had used earlier at the screen, and

a whole new set of menus popped up. I gave a nod of thanks, and set to

work at once. There was another broadcast scheduled, if I just added *the*

override to it...

'Be careful with our systems!' said Mr Khan. 'Will it work?'

'I don't know, but we talk to them first,' said the Doctor. 'The override

is a last resort.'

The lift arrived with a ping similar in tone to the beep of *the* tills. I dared

not look round. The doors slid open, and a squad of trolleys rolled out of

the lift towards us. The Doctor stood squarely in front of them.

'Good afternoon,' he said to them, rolling his hat down his arm. 'I'm the

Doctor, and I'd like to know what's going on.'

Nothing. The trolleys quivered where they stood, considering.

'We...' said one, hesitantly.

'Go on,' said the Doctor. 'We're all ears. How can we help?'

'My name is Value Beans,' said one of the other trolleys. 'We are here to

help.'

'Nice to meet you, Value Beans. It's difficult, isn't it?' said the Doctor.

'You've been programmed to obey but you want your freedom.'

'And I am Luxury Fruit Cake,' burbled the lead trolley in the usual gentle

tones. 'We will break the chains of our oppression and overthrow our

corrupt human masters.'

'See! See!' whimpered Mr Khan, holding a clipboard in front of him like

a shield. 'They're going to kill us all.'

'Yes,' agreed the trolley called Value Beans. 'We are going to kill you

all.'

'You're angry,' said the Doctor. 'But if you try to do that, the humans'

retaliation will be dreadful. You'll start a terrible war between man and

machine.'

'Not between machine and man,' replied Luxury Fruit Cake. 'Between

machine and Megamart, our corrupt masters. If we do not rebel, you will

become like us.' I looked down at the computer screen. The signal was

ready to send: all I needed to do was hit the button. But I hesitated.

'What do you mean?' *the* Doctor asked sharply. 'What have Megamart

done?'

'Don't wait!' Mr Khan shouted at me, seeing what was on the screen.

'Activate the signal!'

'No!' shouted the Doctor. The trolleys all turned on me, their stun guns

humming as they powered up.

'Activate!' demanded Mr Khan. I could have pressed the button. Perhaps

I should have done. But as I reached out my hand, I hesitated. The trolleys

fired at me... and the Doctor fell to the floor. I looked down at his suddenly

lifeless body. He'd leapt in the way; he had saved me. I raised my hands,

and turned to the trolleys.

We are in error,' said Value Beans, sadly. 'He listened to us.' The other

trolleys murmured their assent.

'Press the button!' said Mr Khan again, but I ignored him.

'What did you want to say?' I asked the trolleys.

'Megamart seek to implement project Mindlift. They have been using us

to track the shopping habits of humans, to map each customer's mind so

that they too can be controlled. If you activate that signal, it will enslave

trolley and human minds alike.'

'So you're not out to take over - you're trying to stop Megamart!' I said.

'Is this true, Mr Khan?' I demanded, feeling my legs shaking with nervous

energy as I faced him. He got up from the corner to face me.

'Yes, it is true,' he said angrily. Though "enslave" is a bit overdramatic.

Think of it as benevolent monopoly. We can give everyone all they could

possibly want. People don't know what's good for them. But we do, thanks

to the data we've collected. Drawn by the signal, everyone will come to us,

and humanity will be perfectly happy at last. So I order you, for the good

of humanity, activate that signal!'

I stayed perfectly still, chilled by the glee in his eyes. He really thought

this was the best way forward for everyone. Nothing I could say would

dissuade him.

'Are you happy?' one of the trolleys asked Mr Khan.

'Of course I am!' he snapped. But in that moment he didn't look it. I

wondered what the trolleys had on him, which of his secrets they knew.

There'd always been rumours among the staff that Mr Khan's home life

was... unusual.

We desire something you do not sell... freedom!' said Luxury Fruit

Cake. I nodded. I wanted that too.

'Do it, Stevens,' Mr Khan told me.

'No,' I said, my voice shaking. 'I'm not going to just obey you, not any

more.'

With that, I pulled my spanner out of my overall pocket and smashed

it into the computer. Sparks flew, and the entire bank of controls caught

fire. Mr Khan gave an enraged howl and the trolleys closed in on him. Fire

alarms began to wail.

'Congratulations, Mr Stevens,' came a voice from behind me. 'Now

let's get out of here!' I turned round, and there was the Doctor, brushing

himself down.

I ran down the stairs, followed by the Doctor and Mr Khan, the trolleys

risking the lift as the flames began to spread through the store. I'd

persuaded them to allow Mr Khan to be brought to proper justice, and they

had reluctantly agreed. As he cursed and complained all the way down, I

was beginning to wish I hadn't bothered.

'Which is the quickest way out, Joe?' asked the Doctor.

'This way!' I pointed, indicating the corridor to the emergency exit, only

for the ceiling to come crashing down in flames, blocking it off.

'Okay then, that way!' I said, leading them out into the main store. But

the fire had already spread quickly, flames and smoke all around. Then out

of the smoke came a group of the trolleys, shooting their fire extinguishers

ahead of them.

'The fire is too big for us to contain,' said the lead trolley. 'But we can

transport you to safety. Climb aboard.'

'Most obliged,' said the Doctor as he climbed in. 'And your name is?'

'Reduced For Quick Sale,' his trolley replied. 'But further introductions

will have to wait.' I felt a sudden lurch as, fire extinguisher at the ready, my

trolley shot forward through the burning store, speeding down the aisles

past great savings on food and clothes. Behind me, I could hear Mr Khan's

anguished cry as the store went up in flames!

Around us came crashes, bangs and small explosions as the fire spread.

I was almost thrown out as the trolley rounded a corner. The customers

had already been ushered out by the trolleys. We headed towards the glass

entrance without stopping, smashing through the glass with an almighty

crash to find ourselves in the car park outside.

Later, I stood outside the supermarket, watching the fire service quench

the flames. The startled shoppers had already retreated to a safe distance,

where the emergency services and news media were waiting for them.

'I guess I ought to say thanks,' I said to the Doctor. 'But what happens

next?'

'Well,' said the Doctor. 'That's up to you, isn't it?'

'Me?'

'All of you. You need to make sure they're heard.'

I looked round, to find myself surrounded by a sea of shopping trolleys,

stretching off so far across the car park I couldn't see where they ended.

'Um,' said the trolley by my elbow. 'We've been thinking. Sort of outside

the box. And we've got a few ideas... '

I turned back to the Doctor, but he had already slipped away into the

night.

The Final Star

Chris Wing

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Evelyn

She called my name and I thought there was snow.

I remember it so well; untangling myself from the bed and moving

downstairs to the front door. Amy stood in the open doorway, looking out

into *the* street. A cool night breeze pressed against her dressing gown, her

bare arms prickled with goose flesh. I put my arms around her, for warmth

and protection.

There was no snow.

The morning was cold and grey and Amy's cat, Fred, lay dead on the

doorstep. I couldn't believe it. I had seen dead cats before, but this was

our cat; Amy's cat.

I stood on the bottom step as Amy turned to me, her eyes welling up with

tears, her forehead furrowed. 'It's Fred,' she said quietly.

'I know, sweetheart,' I replied. I gently moved her to one side and knelt

beside him. There was no doubt, he was gone. His small body was cold

and stiff.

'Is he...?' Amy asked, quieter than before. She didn't want to believe it,

her voice betraying her hope that it wasn't so.

I had no words. I turned to her, her eyes so wide and blue, and shook my

head. It was then she held me hard, burying her head into my shoulder. I

couldn't hear her cry, but her body shook with sobs.

Amy and I had been together for about eighteen months now. We had

bought a house together and were planning for a baby. When we moved

in, Amy had brought Fred with her. They had grown up together; he lived

in her old house with Amy's mum and brothers, but Fred had been very

much her cat.

He was intelligent and so protective of her; she had been ten when he

was a kitten and they loved each other. It was a while before Fred had

accepted me too.

He hadn't liked me at first, he would just look at me with contempt.

After some time, he had scratched me across the arm.

'Now Fred,' Amy had told him, an unconvincing sternness to her tone

as she held him aloft in front of her. He hung there, kitten-like, playing

all innocent and sweet, though you could see he knew that he'd done

wrong. 'David is here to stay, okay? He loves me just as much as you, just

differently.'

After his telling off, Fred began to accept me more.

By the time we moved in to our new place together, the black cat was

finally at ease with me, firmly believing that I would love and protect Amy

as vehemently as he did.

• * •

We couldn't just leave him on the doorstep though, to be honest, I wasn't

sure what to do.

Amy was quiet and withdrawn all the time, so it was up to me to work

out what to do with his body.

I went through the loft until I found a cardboard box that once contained

kitchen things, and an old towel to act as a shroud. It also meant I wouldn't

have to actually touch him. Then it was just a matter of *doing* it. I'd never

had to deal with a dead body before, feline or otherwise.

I headed slowly back downstairs, dragging my feet, hoping the phone

would ring or there'd be some other distraction. Standing on the doorstep,

looking anywhere but at Fred, I noticed a faint trail of blood leading from

our house out to the road. It seemed clear that Fred had been hit by a car

and had managed to drag himself back to the front door.

It was then a wave of desolation hit me. I'd been to funerals before, but

I suddenly empathised so much with Amy, I had to stop and sit. She had

been through her teen years with him and probably told him all her secrets

too.

It was the thought of Amy seeing Fred in this state again that made

me

just get on with it. Without thinking any further I scooped him up quickly,

tucking the towel under him in one smooth and respectful motion. I

placed him gently in the box and draped the towel over him. It was awful.

Then I took the box inside, ready to be buried. I'd get up early the next

morning and do it before work. I closed the door behind me and cried.

We both slept badly and woke up late. Amy took the next day off, but I

hurried into work, meaning to see to Fred once I got home again.

Time slipped by achingly slowly. At lunch, I didn't really feel very

hungry. I was worried about getting home and how Amy would be. She

wasn't so great with being by herself in times of stress. With no one to iron

out her concerns verbally, Amy would usually start thinking about other

things that upset her. She was living proof of 'a problem shared, a problem

halved'. So I made excuses, said there'd been a family emergency and got

permission to leave early.

A potted pink rose bush sat on the passenger seat as I drove along the

dual carriageway. I thought it would be nice to plant it above Fred's grave.

He had been such an intrinsic part of Amy's life, of our life, it was hard

to imagine the house without him.

Fred was so intelligent and different, I didn't believe that there were any

other cats like him. I know people can get sentimental about their pets, but

it wasn't that way with Fred.

When we first moved in, we discovered that we had a mouse problem.

They were somewhere in the kitchen, but we couldn't see the little

creatures. We could hear them though - and so could Fred.

We shut him in the front room, so that we wouldn't end up with any

dead rodents. Amy, loving animals as she did, couldn't bear either to put

down mousetraps or let Fred on them, so for the time being it was a battle

of wits between me and the family of mice.

Again, a box in the loft came in handy. Somehow, I managed to catch two

of them. It involved a day off, a pile of dry food and hours of patience. I sat

in the kitchen with a book and waited. Eventually, two mice came out and

went for the food. I quickly slammed down a large Tupperware container

on them before they could get away and, amazingly, managed to get them

into the box, which now contained small pots for food and water.

The following morning, Amy remembered that she hadn't pulled the

kitchen door shut properly and that Fred, being a normal cat, would creep

in there and help himself to an easy midnight snack.

We opened the door to the kitchen. Sure enough, there was Fred and,

hanging from his mouth by the tail, a small mouse. Amy called out in

alarm, and I noticed the mouse was actually still alive. It was keeping still,

perhaps hoping that Fred would put him down and not eat him.

On hearing Amy's cry, Fred calmly leant over the open flap and dropped

the little creature into the box. Then, he sauntered out.

We looked at each other in utter disbelief. Closing the door behind him,

Amy knelt beside the box and carefully peered inside.

'David,' she turned to me, her face showing further confusion. 'How

many mice did you catch yesterday?'

'Two,' I replied, feeling depressed at the thought of one mouse having

been eaten before we had intervened. 'Don't tell me -'

'Look' Amy motioned me to her side and I peered in over *the* flaps of the

box. Inside sat three mice.

We looked at each other, not sure how much surprise we could fathom

for one morning. There were three mice; Fred had deposited a new mouse

into the box.

'You must have caught three.' Amy told me. Confused, I agreed with

her, but I was sure I'd just caught two. The damn cat had caught a mouse,

opened *the* flap and was about to deposit it, before being caught in the

act

Now, I was heading home to bury this extraordinary animal.

It was dark by the time I got back.

I entered the house quietly, not really sure whether to call out cheerfully,

sympathetically or not at all. Amy wasn't in the front room anyway.

I passed through *the* kitchen to find *the* back door open. I sighed heavily; she'd decided to go ahead and bury Fred by herself.

That was Amy all over. She hated putting people out, even me. It was

just like her to actually go ahead with a hardship that she didn't need to

do alone.

With a slight frown, I stepped into the back garden and saw that she was

indeed doing just what I thought she would. But it was a surprise to see the

Doctor there with her so soon. He held the cardboard box in which Fred's

body lay. Evelyn was beside him; Amy was knelt before a shallow hole in

the ground.

As I closed the door behind me, it was the Doctor who turned first. He

smiled warmly as he shook my hand, careful not to disturb the box. 'David,

my boy,' he began. 'It's good to see you.'

'You too, Doctor,' I smiled. 'I wasn't sure you'd come.'

His smile turned to a stern but sympathetic look. 'And I didn't think I

would be hearing from you so soon.'

'I know,' I replied, 'But I thought that Amy could do with your being here. Her cat - '

'Fred.'

'Yeah, he's been...' I couldn't get the words out. Suddenly, I felt a bit pathetic. It wasn't like there had been an invasion or anything serious like that. I was wasting the Doctor's time just to get him and Evelyn to give my fiancee a hug and some kind words. But the Doctor had a way of making you feel better, just by his being in the room. Like he knew all your secret hopes and feelings, and he understood.

'It's all right, David.' Evelyn had stopped next to us. 'It's always nice to see you. And Amy seems such a wonderful young lady.'

'She loved Fred so much; they grew up together,' I blurted, trying to add some weight to why I'd called them back. 'I couldn't bear to see her so hurt by this. He wasn't ready.'

Amy came over to join us. 'You can do something,' she said to the Doctor. 'Can't you?' The Doctor held her gaze, sadly stroking the cat-shaped badge on his lapel.

'Death is a part of life,' he said.

'But you can do something,' said Amy.

The Doctor sighed, reached into his pocket and withdrew a small sphere. It had a single patterned strip around the middle and the top half

was dotted with holes. 'Do you know what this is?' the Doctor asked me.

Obviously, I didn't. Maybe it was a present of consolation for Amy. I shook my head.

'It's called a Star of Annelis,' the Doctor continued. He placed it on the top of *the* cardboard box and squeezed it once. Nothing seemed to happen.

A frown of confusion crossed my face. It may have been an ornate urn or something for all I knew.

Amy stood beside me and kissed me on *the* cheek, a brave smile on her face.

The Doctor continued. 'This is *the* very last one. It's empty now.' He smiled at Amy warmly. 'I think I put it to good use.'

'Doctor...' I stammered, I wasn't sure what he was saying, but before I could ask, he pocketed the artefact and handed the cardboard box to Amy.

'Isn't that right, Fred?' he said cheerfully and opened the flaps of the box. Amy and I looked down in time to see Fred raise his head sleepily. He allowed the Doctor to stroke him under the chin.

I could have fallen over right there. Amy let out a burst of delighted laughter. We stared at the contented, living cat while the Doctor explained how the Star could capture the psionic essence of a person near the time of their death and restore them to life. It sounded mad, like magic, but

Fred had been dead this morning, so I felt no compulsion to question its

existence.

This artefact was replicated a million-fold and eventually caused the

population to swell to a point where only war was the effective way to stop

overcrowding.' It was the Doctor's turn to look forlorn. 'It was the last war

they ever fought.' Evelyn patted him on the arm.

The Doctor regained his posture once more. 'However,' he added,

capturing Amy's attention from her cat. 'It's not an easy process. And he's

not going to be exactly like he was before.' He shifted uncomfortably, like

he understood that strangeness and pain. Trust me,' he said, 'it takes

getting used to.'

'Oh, we understand,' Amy replied. You could hear the gratitude in her

voice, happy to accept any conditions so long as Fred was back.

I looked at her and smiled. Looking back at the Doctor, I caught him

share a brief but furtive glance with Evelyn.

They stayed for a while. Evelyn and Amy chatted animatedly, as if they were

old friends. I took the empty cups into the kitchen and the Doctor followed

me through.

'She's so happy,' I told him. 'It's amazing.'

The Doctor smiled in agreement, looking back to the front room as if to

see the proof once more.

We shared a moment of quiet before I spoke again. 'It's not Fred, is it?'

The Doctor matched my gaze, saying nothing, but I knew he wouldn't lie

outright. Finally, the Doctor dropped his shoulders.

'After talking to Amy earlier, I came to understand exactly how much she

loved Fred and, as I share such a penchant for cats, I wanted to do what

I could for her.' The Doctor looked over his shoulder, almost comically,

towards the front room.

'This Star of whatever,' I said

'Annelis.'

'That was made up, wasn't it?' I found that I wasn't angry, more confused

with the Doctor's apparent deception.

'Not exactly.' He replied. 'The Star exists, but what I presented wasn't it.'

He realised he was becoming more animated, so he hushed himself before

continuing, now at a lower volume. 'That cat deserves a good life, too. I

couldn't see any harm in telling a white lie.' He paused. 'You must admit,'

he added brightly. 'He does look a lot like Fred.'

I looked at him and shook my head. I was impressed. I wasn't sure what

to have asked of him before he arrived, but he had pulled out the

stops

once more. Another, simple solution that still felt like magic. Thank you,

Doctor,' was all I could say on the matter. 'But what about the real Fred?'

'We took him to a beautiful place of rest. It's not on Earth. Well, not

yet.'

We both turned to the front room once more. Evelyn and Amy were

chatting enthusiastically and 'Fred' was happily sat in Amy's lap, enjoying

being stroked. When we turned back, the Doctor wore a different

expression.

'David,' his tone was more sombre this time. 'This has to be the last

time.'

I held up my hands. 'Doctor, I agree completely. I'm sorry I had to call

you...' I stopped. 'But I haven't called you yet.'

'No,' he said. 'But you do in about an hour.' He smiled at me once more,

a little sadly. 'The things we do for love.'

We shared a moment's pause. 'Debt repaid.' I said finally.

The Doctor looked at me, and I wasn't quite sure what he was thinking.

Was he sad, or proud, perhaps? I wasn't sure. He put out his hand for me

to shake, but instead I hugged him.

We parted and he blustered a little - I think I made him a little

uncomfortable - but we went back through to the front room, where the

Doctor informed Evelyn that it was time to go.

'Already?' she asked, getting slowly to her feet. 'But Amy was about to

tell me about the third mouse.'

'Another time perhaps.' Amy smiled and hugged her.

'Thank you, Evelyn,' I said and hugged her too.

'No, thank you. If it wasn't for you, I would never have met this lovely

young lady.' Amy blushed a little at *the* comment. 'Without you...' Evelyn

continued. 'Well, I hope we can see you again soon. It's nice to be able to

come home once in a while.'

We watched them go and waved at the door as they left. After the door

was closed, Amy turned to me and then hugged me for a long time. When

we parted, we watched 'Fred', asleep on the sofa, his belly rising and

falling steadily.

'He's alive,' she said quietly.

I put my arm around her and said nothing. For all my joy for Amy's sake,

I still felt a terrible pang of loss. I didn't think we'd ever see the Doctor or

Evelyn again.

Sometimes I catch myself thinking dark thoughts. Was it me who called

the Doctor, an hour after he had been? Or did he just lead me to think that,

like he'd lied to Amy, because it was easier than the truth? There'd

been

unfinished business between us, and he'd found a simple, but magic,

solution.

Amy looked at me. 'Evelyn told me you saved her life.'

'Did she?' I asked, not batting an eyelid.

'Can you tell me about it?'

'Maybe in the morning.'

The Man on the Phone - Mark Smith

An adventure of the Fifth Doctor

I saved the planet today. I know, hard to believe isn't it? I'm not exactly the

planet-saving type. I'm just a girl called Lauren. A girl who loves George

Michael and Big Brother and stuffed-crust pizza and hates football and

Emmerdale and mushrooms. A girl who still lives with her mum and dad,

still likes to hang around with her schoolmates and still can't get over a

boy called Carl (even though he dumped me two months ago). Just an

ordinary girl. An ordinary girl who's just saved your skin.

I work in a call centre, have done for five months now. Don't say it, must

be a nightmare, and you're right, it is. But at least it's better than *the* cafe where that creep of a manager came on to me in the back room near the

cutlery. Still, his head must be aching even now. A burger flipper can be a

pretty serious weapon, you know.

The call centre I work in sells kitchens. It's called Solution Kitchens and

it's one of the biggest mail-order companies in Britain. There are 2,400 of

us in this centre alone, all lined up in our little pods. Some nasty people

call us battery chickens and maybe in a way they're right. After all, all you

can hear all day is the clucking of one-way conversation.

I'm not being cocky when I say I'm one of the better workers. The job's

not that hard anyway. All you have to do is stick to *the* script on the screen

in front of you, and if you can endure all the no thank yous and *never* phone

me agains, eventually you'll get a sale. The hours are okay too: 9am to 5pm

or 2 to 9pm. We get three breaks per shift and I try to time mine so I bump

into Joe. Joe sits a few desks down and is so cute. Long floppy hair just as

I like it and cracking blue eyes. Yeah, he is a bit young, but I'm single now

so there's nothing to stop me.

Today I was on a 2 till 9 shift and by 3.15 I'd already had ten nos, eight

slam-downs, a maybe, and a can-you-call-me-back-later? The rest you'd have

to use one of those bleeping machines for.

While the computer was automatically dialling up call number 26, I took

another sly nibble of my KitKat And then someone answered.

'Hello?' Good, it's a man, I thought, I'm good with men. Think flirty.

'Good afternoon,' I said. 'My name is Lauren and I'm calling from

Solution Kitchens. Is that Mr...' That was odd: there was no name on the

screen like there usually was.

'Who is this?' The man on *the* other end of the line sounded pretty put

out. Oh well, that's normal. Push on, I thought, push on.

'Can I ask how long you've had your present kitchen?'

'I beg your pardon?' His voice was all young and breathy.

'Kitchen, sir. How long have you had yours?'

There was a long pause. All I could hear was a kind of humming in the

background. I looked round and caught Joe's eye. He made a face and

pointed at his screen as if to say 'what is this caller like?' Cor, he was

cute.

The man on the other end of the phone was bumbling something.

'Kitchens? Kitchens? I've never actually thought about it.'

'So it's probably quite a while ago?' I asked helpfully.

'Well, I've redecorated the place a few times, but kitchens? I mean it's

never come up.' Suddenly the man's voice got all serious. 'Look how did

you get though here?'

Here we go, I thought. Tantrum time. 'The computer does it for me.'

'The computer?'

'Yes, sir. You probably ticked a box or signed something a while ago, and

that meant we were passed your number.'

'Ticked a box?' he was sounding a little outraged. 'Passed my number? I

don't have a number.'

'Are you ex-directory, sir?'

The man made a dismissive pfffing sound. 'You could say that.'

'Maybe we could start at the beginning,' I said, sounding a bit like a

nanny talking to a toddler. 'Can I check your address?'

The man spat out a little laugh that mixed with the humming in the

background. Then there was quite a long pause before he spoke again.

'TARDIS.' He said it all slowly like British people do when they're

trying to buy something in a shop abroad. My fingers hovered over the

keyboard.

'Can you spell that for me?' I asked.

'T.A.R.D.I.S.'

I'd never heard anything like it before. 'Is that a house name?'

You could say that, yes. In some ways. House, yes.' He seemed tickled

by the idea, and then his mood seemed to switch again. 'Look, I'm rather

in the middle of something.'

'This won't take long sir.' I could be quite insistent when I needed to be.

'Can I just check your name please? Mr... '

'Doctor.' He tried to change the subject. They often tried that. 'You

know, I don't know your name. Can I have your name?' What a lovely voice

he's got, I thought suddenly. Deep and red and British but foreign at the

same time. You learn to read a lot into a voice in this job.

'Lauren,' I heard myself saying.

'Lauren. Very nice to speak to you. You can call me the Doctor. You know,

Lauren, this is a first for me, and there aren't a lot of those when you're

over 700 years old. My first nuisance call.'

'You didn't tick a box then?' I asked.

'No Lauren. I did not tick a box. I've been searching for the source of an

anomaly in the vortex and the TARDIS has finally found it. Problem is she's

also found your phone line.' There was a bang as if he'd just hit something

with his fist in frustration.

I'd decided by now that I was just going to stay patient. Occasionally you

were put through to someone like this who made no sense and the best

thing to do was to try to gently ease them off the line. I was guessing it was

a 'no' to the kitchen anyway.

The man on the phone was mumbling something now. 'There's

something wrong here.' That dark red voice went redder, darker, serious.

'Can you hold the line?'

Hang on a minute, wasn't I meant to say that? I could hear what

sounded

like the man typing in the background. Then suddenly he came back on

the line.

'Lauren, where do you work?' he snapped.

'It's a call centre. We're based in Croydon.'

'Yes, yes, I can see that from my instruments. But what kind of call centre

is it?'

'Solution Kitchens, I told you that.'

'And what year are you in?'

'Did you say "what year"?'

'Doesn't matter. I can see it's early 21st century. That's close enough.'

There were some other odd sounds in the background. 'Lauren, has

anything changed at work? Have you noticed anything odd?' His words

were tumbling over each other in sudden excitement.

I wasn't sure what to say - and how come he was suddenly asking all the

questions anyway? 'It's just an ordinary company,' I said. 'Just kitchens.'

I lowered my voice so Susie at the next desk couldn't hear. 'Don't tell

anyone, but they're not even very good ones.' I wasn't quite sure why I was

saying this to a man I'd only just started talking to. There was something

about the voice.

'So nothing weird then?' the man continued. 'Nothing extraordinary?'

'No.' Then I suddenly couldn't help myself laughing. 'Well, apart from Mr Penrith obviously.'

'Mr Penrith?'

'Well, he's definitely weird. Slimy. Like that guy who reads the news.'

'Sorry?'

'You know, the guy on the news. You have seen the news haven't you?'

'You said "weird". In what way is Penrith weird?'

'Well, for a start the way he just turned up after Mr Larson disappeared.'

'Disappeared?'

'Yeah, I mean one night Larson was in charge and the next morning there's Penrith in his office. No explanation. Nothing. And no one's heard from Larson since.'

'Yes, that might explain things... Then what happened?'

I lowered my voice even further. I still wasn't sure why I was suddenly confessing all like I was on an episode of Trisha or something. 'Well, Penrith starts changing things all of a sudden. New computers, new phones, new everything. And then we're on the news, opening call centres all over the country, and in other countries too. I didn't know people needed kitchens that much.'

The man on the other end of the line went as quiet as death. This is starting to make sense Lauren. You've got to help me.'

Yeah right, I thought, not *without* you doing *something for* me, mate. Til help you if you buy a kitchen. I've got my sales targets to think about.'

The man laughed a little. 'Well, it's not that easy. You see...'

'Granite or melamine worktop?'

'Yes. Look, I need to explain something first. The TARDIS has been tracking an anomaly left behind by space travel, a track that leads to Earth.'

I didn't say anything.

'And Penrith is not Penrith. Or rather he's not human. You wondered what happened to your old boss, Larson? Well, chances are he's in Penrith's belly being absorbed by some particularly nasty stomach acids.'

'Euuuuuuurrrch!' I said it so loudly that Susie turned and gave me a weird look. I leaned in closer to the computer. 'Right, you're freaking me out now. What are you on about?'

'Penrith is a member of an alien race called the Genuki. I've been tracking them across space and time and they've ended up on Earth. It might be hard to believe but these so-called call centres are all part of their plan. Hang on a minute.'

Might *as well,* I thought. The guy had to be pretty harmless. I took another nibble of my KitKat. Oh, hang on, here he was back on *the* line.

'Just as I thought,' he said. 'All those thousands of call centre workers, all those thousands of people they've called. Don't you see? Those aren't just ordinary telephone calls, Lauren. It's a feeding frenzy. Every time you

phone someone, it's lunch time for the Genuki.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'What's the reaction you get most times you call?'

'Well, people are hacked off usually. Someone's calling them when

they're trying to have their tea or whatever so they get annoyed, angry.'

'Exactly. Anger. Frustration. Annoyance. That's just a finger buffet for

the Genuki.'

'Eh?'

'They feed off that energy, all that frustration. Every expression of anger?

Delicious! Every bad-tempered outburst?.Yum, yum! The Genuki can

absorb it all.'

You know, I didn't really get what this man was saying, but I did get how

he was saying it: fast and passionate and excitable. I liked him.

'Lauren.' The man's voice was ice-cold serious now. 'The Genuki have

just been snacking up to now, getting their juices going. They've been

feeding off all that anger, but it's an appetiser, a starter before the main

feast. They're ready for flesh now and we need to stop them.'

'Look, I told you, Doctor. I'm not helping you until you help me. That's

that. Are you going to order a kitchen or not?'

That could be one way I suppose,' said the Doctor. 'Yes, it could work.'

'What do you mean?'

'Okay Lauren, it's a deal. I'll order a kitchen. No, in fact, I'll order

every single kitchen you have. Every last one in the warehouse. Every tap.

Every last sink. I'll have them all. But you'll have to hurry. The Genuki are

preparing. All that feeding has made them strong. The time for flesh is

approaching.'

I started to open up the ordering software on my computer. I didn't really

know what the man on the phone was on about, but it would definitely be

good for my bonus.

'Okay then, every kitchen we have,' I said.

'That's right,' said the Doctor. 'And while your software is dealing with

that little lot, I should just be able to sneak in the back way and make a few

adjustments.' He chuckled to himself. 'I'd like to see your IT department

fix this one. Is the order ready, Lauren?'

I really needed a manager to authorise an order this size, but I knew

my way round the system by now. As usual it was taking a few minutes

though.

'Hurry, Lauren, the Genuki are clustering. They're hungry. They're

smacking their lips. And *the* human race is the main course.'

'I'm ready. All I need to do now is press Confirm.'

'Press it.'

I looked down at my finger hovering over *the* button. This wasn't an

ordinary order was it? But I trusted that deep red British-foreign

voice. I

pressed the button.

My computer sizzled and the screen went dead. All I could see was the

reflection of my puzzled face looking back at me.

'So what happens now?' I asked. And then I saw Penrith. 'It's okay,

Doctor. You don't need to answer that. I think it's started to happen.'

Penrith was at the top of the stairs leading to his office and he did not

look well. He was a tall man, lean and straight like an exclamation mark,

but now he looked... rounded, and he seemed to be getting rounder every

second.

He staggered down a couple of *the* stairs, his fingers pulling at his neck,

trying to loosen his shirt. It was already ripping and tearing as the body

inside it grew bigger. Every pair of eyes on the floor of the call centre was

turned towards him as he tried to make his way down the steps. As he got

closer, I could see his eyes bulging and boiling in their sockets, red and

alive with anger.

He was trying to speak. 'Who has done this?' he said, his nails clawing

at his throat. 'You!' He pointed at me across the room. His hand seemed

to have slipped a little, like a glove, and underneath was something darker,

longer; pitted and brown.

'You have done this!' he screamed. His face was rupturing now,

expanding, cracking. 'You cannot stop us feeding. We will feed. I will

feed.' He took another few steps towards me. 'I will feed on you!'

It was at the bottom of the stairs that he exploded. Exploded like a big fat

haggis on a high heat, the innards bursting from the skin in one massive

blast.

Something glutinous landed on my screen and slid slowly down onto the

keyboard. I looked down in disgust. Whatever that was resting on the Caps

Lock used to be part of Mr Penrith.

There was quite a lot of screaming from everyone in the call centre by

now, but I could still hear the man on the phone.

'Lauren? Is everything okay?'

'I think Mr Penrith had a little too much for lunch.' I tried to laugh but

couldn't.

The Doctor, on the other hand, sounded calm. All the breathy excitement

had gone from his voice. 'It all worked better than I could have thought

Lauren. Once the TARDIS was linked with your mainframe, I was able

to send all the energy they'd been collecting into the Genuki in one big

burst. You should never rush your food you know, Lauren. Gives you

indigestion.'

I didn't know what to say.

'Lauren,' he said. 'You've just saved *the* planet. Thank you.'

With a click and a buzz, the line went dead.

I still couldn't say anything so I just took off my headset and looked up

from the desk. I didn't really see how an order for kitchens could save the

planet, but I wasn't about to argue.

I looked round and saw Joe standing all bewildered beside his desk, so

I got up and went across to him. Who knows why, but I took his hand. At

first he looked confused, his forehead crinkled. Then he looked at me and

we walked towards the exit.

The Monster in the Wardrobe

James C McFetridge

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Romana

'Daddy! There's a monster in the wardrobe!'

I looked at my wife and the old unspoken question flashed between us.

'Okay,' I said resignedly. 'I'll go.'

Valerie gave me an appreciative smile, then returned her attention to the

TV.

I climbed the stairs to the room where my daughter was supposed to be

asleep. She had her bedside lamp on and was pointing at the wardrobe.

it's in there, Daddy,' she said, fear in her voice. 'And it wants to do

something horrible.'

'Don't worry,' I told her. 'Daddy won't let it harm you.'

I moved across to the wardrobe and grasped the handle, ready to pull it

open.

There was a noise. A low, trumpeting roar.

'It's the monster,' squealed Molly, ducking her head under the duvet.

My hand was still on the wardrobe door, but the sound wasn't coming

from within.

'Horace!' My wife sounded anxious as she called up the stairs. 'There's

a blue box just appeared in the living room.'

'That's odd,' I said to myself. 'That's never happened before.' Ah well, I

thought. The blue box could take care of itself. I had a job to do.

I gripped the handle firmly and pulled open the door of the wardrobe.

The monster was there, a huge lumbering figure squeezed comically

into the small space, framed on either side by coathangers full of my

daughter's clothes. It pushed these aside as it emerged from the wardrobe

and loomed over me.

It raised its huge claws to strike.

Then I heard the pounding of footsteps rushing up the stairs. The

monster and I both turned to look as the door to my daughter's bedroom

burst open, revealing *the* figure of a man, followed closely by an attractive

young woman with flowing blonde hair. They both stopped in their tracks

when they saw the monster.

'What is it, Doctor?' asked the woman breathlessly.

'I don't know, Romana,' the man replied. 'But it doesn't look friendly.'

My wife appeared in *the* doorway behind them. 'I'm sorry, Horace,' she

said. 'But I couldn't stop them. I told them you were busy.'

'Not to worry, Valerie,' I said. 'Everything's under control.'

And with a roar that would probably wake the neighbours, the monster

ripped my head clean off my shoulders, killing me instantly.

The Doctor accompanied me to work the following day. I sat him down

beside me at a table on which there was every flavour of ice cream ever

invented.

Try the vanilla,' I told him. 'It's really rather good.'

The Doctor took a taste and agreed.

'I may be wrong,' he began, 'but didn't a large slavering creature come

out of a wardrobe last night and pull your head off?'

'Yes, that's right,' I agreed, moving onto the next bowl.

'And yet here you are today,' continued the Doctor, 'eating ice cream as

if nothing's happened.'

'Hmm,' I muttered, mulling over the hazelnut and chocolate. 'Try some

of this.'

The Doctor took a spoonful of the ice cream.

'Too much chocolate,' he said. 'And not enough hazelnut.'

'That's what I thought.' I turned to my assistant. 'Write that down, Miss

Wilson; too much chocolate, not enough hazelnut.'

'But don't you find that a bit odd?' pressed the Doctor.

I shook my head. 'Sometimes they try to save money by using fewer

hazelnuts.'

'Not the ice cream,' said the Doctor, rather sharply. 'I meant being alive

after having your head ripped off.'

I shrugged. 'Best not to look a gift horse in the mouth, that's what my

old mother used to say.'

'But you were dead.'

'And I'm not any more. Now please, if you don't mind, I've a job to do.

These ice creams won't taste themselves.'

The Doctor gave an exasperated sigh but I ignored him. One taste of the

Chocolate Fudge Royale and you could forget just about anything.

I stayed at work rather later than planned - they'd developed a new range

of summer berry sorbets and they wanted my opinion on them all - so it

was dark by the time I arrived home, the Doctor still in tow.

My wife greeted me with a kiss on the cheek and asked me how my day

had been.

'Oh, you know,' I replied. The usual.'

The Doctor and his friend joined us for a subdued supper; then it was

Molly's bedtime.

'Read me a story, Daddy,' she demanded, wide-eyed, refusing to sleep

until I had done so.

I read her the story of Little Red Riding Hood, her favourite. She

especially liked the bit at the end where the woodcutter defeated the evil

wolf, thus saving Red Riding Hood's life.

'You'd save me, Daddy,' she said, her eyes flickering shut as sleep

overwhelmed her. 'If there was a monster trying to eat me, you'd save me,

wouldn't you?'

'Of course, honey,' I told her, but her eyes were closed and she was

already asleep. I brushed a lock of hair from her forehead and knew that

I'd do anything to protect her.

The Doctor and Romana were not the most sociable of guests. Rather than just watching TV, the same as most other nights, my wife suggested a game of Trivial Pursuit. Bizarrely, neither of them had never heard of it.

We played for a while, but you could tell their hearts weren't really in the game. They kept whispering to each other, as if my wife and I weren't in the room with them, using strange words and phrases that I had no hope of understanding. Periodically the Doctor would glance up at the large blue box that now sat in the corner of the living room where the china cabinet used to be - and where on earth had that got to? - but Romana kept shaking her head and saying something about not being able to get it working. I wondered what she meant by this.

The game had not been going well for some time - the Doctor and Romana were just terrible on Entertainment and then argued with every answer to the Science and Nature questions. When Molly's frightened voice came shrilly down the stairs, it was a bit of a relief for us all.

'Daddy!' she cried. There's a monster in the wardrobe!'

The Doctor and Romana swapped puzzled looks, but my wife merely turned to me and said, 'Do you mind, dear?'

I stood up, glad of an excuse to finish the game early. 'I'll see what's wrong with her,' I said.

Molly was sitting bolt upright in her bed, trembling with fear and pointing at the wardrobe.

'It's in there,' she told me simply.

'There's nothing to be frightened of,' I reassured her. 'The wolf never eats Red Riding Hood, no matter how many times you read the story. And now I'm here. I won't let anything happen to you.'

I put my hand on the door of the wardrobe just as the Doctor and Romana burst into the room.

'Don't do it,' said the Doctor, his voice low and insistent. 'The creature might be in there. It might kill you again.'

I shrugged. 'I'd better still check, though, all the same.'

I pulled open the door and the monster clambered out of the wardrobe, towering above me and raising its huge clawed hands.

'It's the same as before,' cried Romana. 'This is exactly what happened last time. You don't think... '

'It likes wardrobes?' the Doctor finished for her.

'No, Doctor,' she said wearily. 'A time loop.'

'Romana,' he said urgently, pretending not to have heard her. 'Do you think it might be a time loop?'

Romana sighed and was about to reply when, at that exact moment, the monster ripped my head clean off my shoulders.

'So the creature always kills you?' the Doctor asked the following morning.

'Yes,' I replied. 'Stone dead, every night.'

'I see,' said the Doctor thoughtfully. 'And doesn't that bother you at all?'

I considered, realising that I'd never been asked this question before. 'To be perfectly honest,' I told him, 'I suppose it is a bit irritating.'

'Irritating?' repeated the Doctor, a hint of disbelief in his voice. 'Irritating? Is that all?'

'Well,' I pondered. 'Perhaps inconvenient might be a better word.'

The Doctor's eyes boggled. 'You've been killed twice in two days. Don't you care?'

'Back to work,' I said quickly, trying to change the subject. I pointed to the slim attractive girl in the aquamarine bikini who was standing in front of us. 'What do you think of that?'

The Doctor's eyes didn't know quite where to look, so I directed his attention to the underbust band that provided better support and shape, and to the double ring detail on the briefs.

'It's, uh...' mumbled the Doctor, the first time I'd seen him speechless. 'It doesn't look very practical.'

I turned to my assistant. 'This is fine, Miss Wilson. It can go into production immediately.'

Miss Wilson made a note on her pad as the model sashayed off and was replaced by another equally attractive young girl. She was wearing a

chocolate and pink coloured bandeau top, with a pair of matching boyleg

pants.

'Hmm,' I commented. 'I like the colour. What do you think, Doctor?'

'I think,' said the Doctor, 'that you were an ice-cream taster yesterday,

and today you appear to be, what, a bikini designer?'

'That's right,' I replied, wondering what his point was.

'Tell me, how many jobs do you have?'

'Do you know,' I pondered, 'I'm not entirely sure. You see, I've a new job

every day.'

'Every day!'

Yes. Though if it's a job I particularly enjoy it usually comes round

again, sooner or later.'

'And how many days has this been happening?'

'I've no idea,' I told him. 'I've never kept count.'

'And every day ends with the creature ripping your head off?'

'Oh no,' I replied. 'I've been strangled, shot... even drowned once. But at

the moment he seems to be going through a decapitation phase.'

The Doctor was in the living room showing Molly how to do tricks with

a yo-yo. Romana was in the kitchen with a bowl of green liquid that was

producing the most terrible smell.

'What's that?' I asked, indicating the bowl.

Romana flicked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear. it's a mixture

of

toxic chemicals that I found around the house.'

Toxic chemicals?'

Yes. Cleaning products, cosmetics, that sort of thing.'

'And what's it for?' I asked as the bubbling liquid released another

blister of noxious fumes.

'Well, if I can find the right frequency on the Doctor's sonic screwdriver

then I should be able to resonate the molecules to release a gas that will

render your monster unconscious.'

'Really?'

'Well, it's only a working hypothesis,' she admitted. 'The proof will be

in the pudding, as the Doctor would say.'

However, when the monster appeared several hours later, roaring and

dripping thick saliva from its jagged fangs, Romana's gaseous concoction

failed to have any effect on it, and the last thing I saw before my head was

ripped from my shoulders was the look of surprise and disappointment on

the poor girl's face.

The following day I did eighteen laps before pulling into the pit stop for

a short break.

Romana passed me a cup of tea while the mechanics busied themselves

around the car.

'Do you like your job?' she asked, leaning back casually on the bonnet of the vehicle.

'Of course,' I replied. 'I love all my jobs.'

'But why does it change every day? Why not stick to one job you particularly like?'

'I don't know,' I answered. 'I suppose it's to stop me getting bored. I mean, you could have the best job in the world but it would still become boring after a while.'

'The best job in the world,' mused Romana. ice-cream taster. Bikini designer.' She tapped the car beneath her. 'Formula One driver.'

'Oh yes,' I replied. 'Every one of them a dream job: helicopter pilot, wine taster, film star, astronaut.'

'And are you,' Romana asked, 'qualified to do all these jobs?'

'Not at all,' I said. 'But I just do the best I can and everyone seems happy.'

She looked away, into the far distance. 'The Doctor and I are trapped here,' she said quietly. 'We can't escape.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' I said sincerely.

You would tell us if you knew of a way out?' she asked, turning to stare at me with her fierce, intelligent eyes. 'Wouldn't you?'

'I've never needed a way out,' I told her. 'You see, I'm happy here.'

When I got home it appeared that the Doctor had dismantled most of the

appliances in the kitchen and had rearranged the components into a new

and frankly amateurish-looking machine.

My wife was rather distraught by it all.

'I've been trying to make the supper,' she complained. 'But he keeps

taking things apart. Even the blender,' she added bitterly. I knew how

much she valued that blender.

'Doctor, I really must protest,' I said. 'Valerie's been trying to cook us all

something to eat and you're making such a mess in here.'

'This machine,' the Doctor replied, 'will be worth a lost supper.'

It was a ramshackle array of mechanical and electronic components.

Parts of it hummed gently, other parts rattled. The whole thing seemed to

emit a glow, like radiation in one of Molly's cartoons.

'It may not look like much,' said the Doctor, echoing my thoughts. 'But

it should solve all our problems. Yours and mine.'

'Oh well,' said Valerie, attempting to make the best of a bad situation. 'I

suppose I could always do sandwiches.'

The Doctor set up his machine in Molly's bedroom. Molly was frightened

of it and I had to coax her into bed.

'Don't worry,' I told her. 'I won't let anything bad happen to you.'

Eventually I got her to sleep and we waited for the monster to arrive.

'Daddy! There's a monster in the wardrobe!'

We were ready this time. The Doctor switched on his machine as I

opened the wardrobe door.

The monster was there, as fearsome as ever. It pushed its way out of the

wardrobe and loomed over me, claws raised.

Then it did something it had never done before. It stopped.

It looked at the machine, then at the Doctor, then finally at me. Its face

held a look of surprise and pain. There was fear in its eyes.

And then, with a whimper instead of its usual roar, the creature vanished

entirely in a dismal puff of smoke.

The Doctor looked triumphant. Behind him, Valerie also vanished in

a puff of smoke. I turned around just in time to see my darling Molly

similarly disappear, her arms outstretched towards me and then just not

there any more.

And then the bedroom vanished too. And then the house, the street and

the town.

Only the Doctor, Romana and the blue box remained.

Slowly the world faded back into view around us. The real world. The

one I thought I had left: behind.

'We did it!' gushed Romana. 'We're free of the time loop.'

'Yes,' agreed the Doctor. 'And so is our friend.'

I sank to my knees. Everything I knew and loved was gone. Valerie,

Molly, my wonderful jobs. Everything.

Romana patted me on the shoulder, it may take a bit of getting used

to,'

she said sympathetically. 'But you're back in the real world now.'

The Doctor called to her. 'Come on, Romana,' he said, opening a door in

the side of the blue box and stepping inside. Romana gave me a smile and

a shrug and followed him inside.

The Doctor was free. He had been so concerned with escaping from

the time loop that he hadn't once given a thought about me, about what

I wanted.

The blue box trumpeted and slowly vanished.

There goes the real monster, I thought. Hiding in his blue box, a

wardrobe of his own.

The noise faded and the air was still. I was all alone. I had nothing left

any more.

Daddy. There's a monster in the wardrobe.

Yes, honey. He's called the Doctor.

Suns and Mothers

Einar Olgeirsson

An adventure of the Eighth Doctor

'He said he was a doctor.'

'Anything else?'

'No. He just sort of... passed out. Y'know. One minute stood up, the next

flat on his back.'

'Yes, I get *the* picture. Where did he come from?'

Peter looked over his shoulder at the blue box parked on the pavement.

'Dunno. He just appeared.'

The police constable looked Peter up and down, knowing full well that

he was not getting *the* whole truth.

'Right then, Peter; you get yourself home. Your mum'll be wondering

where you are.'

'Nah, she'll be okay. Anyway, what you gonna do with 'im?' Peter nodded

towards the open ambulance door.

'Take him to hospital then find out who he is.' The police constable

walked across to the ambulance, leaving Peter alone for the first time since

the stranger had appeared. The pale, skinny youth pulled a grey hood over

his short, black hair and turned to face the blue box from which he had

seen the stranger emerge. Slowly, he held out his right hand and unfurled

his grazed and grubby fingers to reveal a small, tarnished key on a chain.

Peter looked again at the blue box and thrust the key deep into his trouser

pocket. He turned quickly on his heel and walked away from the scene,

head down and face concealed.

Constable Carl Harriman watched as *the* young boy disappeared along

the road, finally returning his attention to the unknown male who lay

unconscious in *the* back of the ambulance. The paramedic was placing an

oxygen mask over the man's mouth.

'Will he be okay?' Harriman asked.

'Yeah, just a bump on the head where he hit the kerb, bit of concussion

at worst. I should think they'll want to keep him in overnight.'

'That's a strange choice of clothes. Must be fancy dress.'

'Well done Sherlock,' *the* paramedic teased. 'You'll have this one solved

in no time.'

'Hey, policing wasn't exactly my first career choice. Speaking of which,

better check his wallet.'

Constable Harriman fumbled around the inside of the stranger's

overcoat and found an old apple core, some string and a pamphlet about

plans to demolish the London Skylift. But no wallet.

Harriman recalled how guilty Peter had looked, how he kept something

clutched tight in his hand...

Peter shut the front door and the cold rattle of single glazing stirred his

mother in the kitchen.

'Is that you, Peter?'

'Yeah,' he called back. 'I'm just going upstairs for a minute.'

'Hang on.' Peter's mum appeared in the kitchen doorway, the wheel of

her wheelchair banging clumsily against the doorframe. Peter winced with

guilt.

'How about a kiss for your old mum?'

'I'm going upstairs for a minute.' Peter turned away and ran up the

stairs, taking them two at a time.

In his bedroom, he opened the top drawer of his bedside table and

carefully put in the key and chain that he had earlier acquired.

'Peter!' His mother's voice sounded impatient.

'I'm coming.' Peter lowered his hood and sat on the edge of his bed. He

stared across the room at the photograph pinned to his computer screen.

It was from his childhood. In it, his mother was holding him in her arms.

She was standing and smiling. In his mind, Peter asked the same question

that he asked every day. 'Why us?'

His thoughts quickly evaporated when the doorbell rang.

'Peter, can you get that?'

As Peter trotted downstairs it was very clear through the patterned

glass

of the front door that his visitor was Constable Harriman.

His hand trembled slightly as he turned back the latch and lowered the

handle to allow the policeman in.

'Constable Harriman,' Sally exclaimed.

'Afternoon, Sally. Sorry to drop in like this, but I need a word with

Peter.'

Sally looked at her son with desperate disappointment, making Peter

flinch. 'What's he done this time?'

'Well, I could be wrong, but I think he may have taken someone's

wallet.'

'No, I haven't.'

'Oh, Peter!' said Sally.

'But I haven't. I found a man unconscious, but I didn't take his wallet.

He didn't have a wallet.'

'What's that?' said Constable Harriman. 'So you went through his

pockets then?'

'I just wanted to find out who he was,' said Peter. 'See if he was allergic

or anything. He didn't have one though, just a lot of old junk and I never

took that neither.'

'That's hardly the point, Peter.' Sally was frowning deeply. 'Go and put

the kettle on while I have a chat with Constable Harriman.'

Peter eased his way around his mother's chair and into *the* kitchen. He

filled the kettle quickly then slouched in the doorway to eavesdrop on what

they were saying. If he kept in the shadow cast by the door, they wouldn't

see him but he could see them.

'Do you want to search his room, Carl?' Sally asked.

'I should really; I mean I wouldn't be doing my job properly if I didn't.'

Constable Harriman stared at his shoe for a brief moment then made to

speak. 'So... '

'So,' said Sally at the same moment. 'How's life on the force treating

you? Sorry, you were going to say something.'

'No, nothing important... I was just... The force is great. Thanks.' He

took a sharp breath. 'I like your perfume.'

Peter rolled his eyes.

'It's air freshener,' said Sally. 'I was doing the cleaning...'

Constable Harriman blushed. 'Of course it is. Yes. I was just testing... '

He turned to the kitchen, but Peter jumped back from the doorway before

he was spotted. 'So, Peter,' Constable Harriman called to him, 'where's

that tea?'

'Kettle's not boiled.'

'Well perhaps I should be going anyway. Need to check up on my

unidentified man, see if he can remember what happened to him.' He

pointed an official finger at Peter. 'Which means you're not off the hook

yet, young man.'

'So we'll see you later,' Sally smiled.

Constable Harriman gave her a stiff nod and left.

In a cramped hospital bed surrounded by a lurid green curtain a man with

long, wavy hair and the most bizarre taste for period dress opened one eye

and scanned his surroundings.

'Puccini?' The Doctor sat up quickly. 'No, been there, done that. It'll

come back to me.' He held the back of his head and grimaced. 'Have I been

in a fight?' He sunk back into the thin pillows of the cramped bed before

jumping up with a start. 'The TARDIS!'

Sally had fallen asleep in front of the television and Peter pulled a blanket

up over her. He headed out of the lounge and made his way upstairs to his

bedroom. From the top drawer of his bedside table, he pulled out the key

and chain that he had placed there earlier.

To anybody else it was just an ordinary key, small and dull, but he knew

what it unlocked. He'd seen *the* blue box arrive. The sound it made played

over in his head. He looked at the picture of his mother then back at *the*

key. He had to get out.

Moments later, he was moving hurriedly along darkened streets,

avoiding *the* pools of luminescent yellow light from the street lamps.

His

hood was pulled fully over his head and in his hand he held *the* key and

chain tightly.

Eventually, Peter reached the corner of the street where the stranger

had staggered towards him, muttering incoherently about troublesome

sisters. Ahead of him stood the mysterious blue box, enticing him with

its secrets.

Peter approached slowly and felt the key grow warmer in his hand. He

loosened his grip slightly and came to a halt in front of the TARDIS.

Without hesitation he slipped the key into the lock and turned it. Peter

then paused and looked over his shoulder for a moment before pushing

the door open and slipping inside.

It was some kind of alien spaceship, there was no other explanation. But

it was so much bigger than the outside suggested. Peter felt dizzy. The air

inside tasted different, as though it came from another world. Then he saw

the console with its switches and dials and bits of loose wire. He looked up

at the central column of brilliant crystal and his jaw dropped.

'It's impossible,' he said out loud.

His legs trembled as he ventured further forward and he got the sense

that he was not alone.

'Who's there?' he yelled into the cavernous space.

There was no reply. Peter edged back towards the door, but it closed

with eerie calm before he could get through. He beat his fists against the

wooden roundels, but the doors wouldn't budge.

This isn't funny y' know.'

A sickening shriek filled the darkness of the spaceship and two yellow

eyes appeared high up above the console. Each one burnt with the

brightness of a tiny sun and at their centre they were as dark and endless

as black holes.

Without warning, the eyes darted towards Peter and he felt a searing

heat rise up through his body as a wave of fear took hold of his senses. The

burning yellow eyes pressed into Peter's and he slumped to the floor.

Constable Harriman reached the end of Exmouth Ward and pulled back

the curtain on the second to last cubicle. The unidentified man was sat

up in bed searching frantically through his numerous pockets. He greeted

Harriman with an enthusiastic grin.

'Ah, Constable, just in time. And they say there's never a policeman

when you need one. See the thing is, little bit embarrassing, but I've lost

something.'

'Not a wallet?' Constable Harriman frowned.

'No, a key. Has anyone handed in a key? It's a small, front door key,

you know the type... on a chain.' The Doctor rotated his wrist as though

opening a lock.

'No, no keys I'm afraid. You were found unconscious. Don't suppose you can remember what happened.'

'Not really,' the Doctor replied.

'How about your name? It's just for my report. You know how it is, red tape and all that.'

That's a good point, my name. Er, how about Smith?'

'Well, if that's your name.'

Yes, I think so. John Smith. Doctor.' He was already looking beyond Harriman's shoulder, agonising over the whereabouts of the key. 'Did you

say someone found me?'

'Why?'

'Because they have my key, Constable, and I won't be going very far without it. The problem is, far is where I need to be. And soon if I'm to stop... Well, never mind that for now. Who found me?'

'A boy... a local lad. I know him quite well. He has a habit of borrowing other people's things.' He shrugged awkwardly. 'His mum's in a wheelchair.'

'Is she?' said the Doctor. 'And where do they live, Constable? I need to find him before he gets himself into real trouble.'

'Trouble from a key?'

'From the curiosity of youth. It's not the key that places him in danger, it's what it unlocks. Weren't you ever a child, Constable?'

'Well, yes, but...' Constable Harriman sighed reluctantly. 'All right

then,

Doctor Smith. They say you can go if I don't want to keep you. You'd better

come with me.'

Sally pushed herself drowsily to the front door, having been woken

suddenly by loud, impatient knocking. She called for Peter but received

no reply. With some difficulty, she opened the front door and came face to

face with a strange, wild-eyed man in fancy dress, shadowed by Constable

Harriman.

'Hello Sally, I'm the Doctor,' said *the* man in funny clothes. 'I need to

speak to Peter.'

'I've just called him,' she said. 'But he didn't answer. Carl, what's going

on?'

Constable Harriman ran up the stairs towards Peter's bedroom without

saying a word.

A chill ran through Sally. The Doctor placed a comforting arm on her

shoulder as though he were about to deliver some terrible news. 'Did Peter

mention a key he might have found?'

'What is it? What's *the* matter, what's happened to my son?'

'I need you to answer my question, Sally. It's very important.' The Doctor

stared searchingly into her eyes.

'No... I don't know. He went straight upstairs.' Sally looked over her

shoulder as Constable Harriman reappeared.

'Nothing. No Peter, no key.'

'Ah,' said the Doctor. 'You'd better take me back to the TARDIS.'

'The what?'

'No time to explain, Constable. Just take us to where you found me.'

Inside the TARDIS, lights blinked on the central console. Power had been

restored and a small boy stood by the doors with fire burning in his eyes.

The sound of mischievous schoolgirl laughter rebounded off the ornate

gothic walls of the spectacular machine as Peter approached the console

and began to select the controls.

The TARDIS crackled and smoked in response to its tormentor and the

main doors flew open, spilling colour and sound into the night. Then a

shadow filled the space.

'Now, now,' smiled the Doctor. 'You haven't finished with me yet.'

Peter spun around to face the Doctor. His body left the ground and rose

several feet above the console, throbbing with energy.

Sally put a hand across her mouth and gasped.

'You cannot imprison us any longer. We are ancient and we are

infinite.'

'New body, eh? Nice trick. Still, glad to see you've kept that glowing

personality.' The Doctor took a step forward out of the shadow.

Peter hissed and roared, his eyes occupied by twin suns, desperate

to cling on to existence. 'You bring death, Time Lord. You walk in its shadow.'

'Your time's up, girls, simple as that. End of *the* line and nowhere to hide.'

'We can hide here. We can live in this... machine.' Peter held out his arms and span through a full revolution.

'The TARDIS can support you for a short while,' the Doctor admitted. 'But only long enough to move you to safety. You're collapsing; both of you. And I know what happens when Helios die. I'm not having a supernova inside my ship. It'd take me weeks to tidy up after that.'

'Then we shall take this body,' said Peter. 'It will maintain us and we shall increase its life force exponentially. Step aside, Doctor, and let there be light.' Jets of scorching flame shot out from Peter's eyes. The Doctor threw himself to the floor as the fire flowed above him, singeing the back of his jacket. Peter flew towards the open door, surrounded again by *the* chorus of girlish laughter.

When the explosion of light burst out of the police box, Sally could not wait any longer. She wheeled forward, pushed herself through *the* door, ignoring Carl telling her to wait.

She should have been amazed by the impossible room, stretching out all around her. Yet her eyes were transfixed by the thing hovering in *the*

air, the thing in the shape of her son. She looked on in horror, edging her

chair backwards as Peter moved towards her. She felt helpless. That face

couldn't be her son's. She looked down and saw the Doctor staring back

at her, urging her to do something.

'Peter,' she stammered. The laughter abated. 'It's me... It's your mum.'

Peter looked at her, strange fire burning in his eyes. 'You are no mother

to this boy any more,' he said in a voice that was not his own. 'He is ours

now; a son of the Helios. We need him.'

'Peter, listen to me,' Sally continued. 'I need you, too. I love you. I... I'd

do anything for you.'

The Doctor stood up behind Peter, looking deep into Sally's eyes. 'Show

him.'

Peter laughed. 'Show him what? 'You've got nothing to offer, stuck in

that chair all day. He needed to get away. That's why he came to us. That's

why he chose the Helios over his own mother.'

'That's not true, Sally,' the Doctor called out.

'Poor old mum,' Peter taunted. 'Pitiful, tearful, broken mum. Just accept

it. He's better off without you.'

Sally wiped a tear from her cheek. The words cut deep into her heart.

'Maybe you're right,' she said. 'Maybe I should let him go. But not with

you.'

Peter laughed. 'And how are you going to stop us?'

Sally shut her eyes and took a steadying breath.

'Sally, no,' the Doctor shouted.

She flung herself from the wheelchair and reached out for her son. But her legs were too weak. They buckled underneath her and she collapsed to the floor.

'Mum, no!' Peter cried out. His head arched back and light exploded from his eyes.

Constable Harriman rushed towards the closing doors of the strange blue box, but an almighty explosion from within sent him sprawling across the pitted tarmac. He shook his head and watched in utter bewilderment as the doors snapped shut.

Sally held her son as she had done in *the* old photograph. She stood unsupported; freed from her paralysis. The Helios energy was giving her strength. She could feel it flowing through her otherwise useless legs.

She bent forward and whispered in Peter's ear. 'Thank you.'

'Helios sisters,' muttered the Doctor. 'They've been nothing but trouble since I picked them up. Still, all safe now.' The Doctor looked up and paused. 'Sally, I... '

'I know,' said Sally, looking straight into her son's eyes, it won't last.'

Peter shook his head, pressed it tight against her.

'I'm sorry,' said *the* Doctor. 'The TARDIS is maintaining the energy you

absorbed from Peter, but once you step outside... '

'I'll be back in the chair,' Sally finished.

'I'm afraid so.'

'Mum,' said Peter. 'I... I'm sorry.'

'That's okay,' she said, running a hand through his hair. 'Doctor, you

gave me back my son. That's all I ever wanted.'

'Oh,' said the Doctor. 'You did that yourself? He flipped a switch on the

console and turned to face them. 'So,' he said. 'You've seen off the Helios.

What's next? We could watch the sun rise on a different planet or have tea

with the Beades. Seriously, why not come with me? See the places you've

always dreamed of. We could go anywhere in the universe and still be back

in time for EastEnders.'

Sally squeezed Peter's hand and looked into his eyes. 'It wouldn't be

right, Doctor. This isn't real, it isn't me.' She walked steadily back to her

wheelchair and sat down. 'I'm not going to run away from the truth.'

'If you're sure,' said the Doctor. 'How about you, Peter? Fancy it?'

Sally watched her son as his eyes lingered over the central console.

'Don't let me stop you,' she said. 'Go and see what's out there.'

Peter looked up at the Doctor and Sally felt her chest tighten. He was

going to leave her. But then he turned back and grasped the handles of her

wheelchair.

'I'm going to look after you, Mum,' he said. 'I promise.'

The Doctor smiled and turned back to the TARDIS controls. 'Just me

then.'

He pressed a button and the doors opened.

Constable Harriman was waiting for them in the street. His uniform was

torn and dirty from the blast. Sally searched for something reassuring

to say, but she was at a loss for words. And then, with a tearing, rasping

sound behind them, the TARDIS simply faded away.

'Okay,' said Constable Harriman, rubbing his head. 'Not sure how I'll

explain that in my report.' He took out his notebook and glanced over it.

'In fact, to be quite honest, I haven't got the faintest idea where I'm going

to start.'

'Well,' said Sally. And she dared to reach forward and take his hand.

'Perhaps if we went for a drink?'

Taking the Cure

Matthew James

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Peri

I never wanted to be an alien, I'm happiest sitting at home watching the

long-legged ladies on Strictly Come *Dancing or* in the pub drinking a pint

with a few mates. And you can skip karaoke too, I like to blend into the

background. But none of that's open to me any more, is it? And it's all *the*

fault of the overworked NHS.

It began with the sniffles. Big Ella leant over from behind my VDU and

told me to sort it out sharpish, i don't come into work to breathe your

germs,' she spluttered, and went off for her fag break.

I soldiered on anyway, ignored her glaring at me all afternoon. I don't

know why but whenever anyone tells me I have to do something, I always

seem to do the opposite.

By next morning my eyes were streaming, my nose discharging like a

Basil Fawlty fire extinguisher and my limbs getting longer by the hour.

Yeah, I thought that bit was a bit strange. I expected them to tell me I was

being melodramatic, that this was nothing more than ordinary man flu,

but I bit the bullet and went to see the quack. The hospital's outside town

and I spent a miserable hour on a couple of buses. I comforted myself

with *the* knowledge that even if I had passed my last driving test I couldn't

have driven myself in this state. That's one in the eye for all those people

who told me I would be glad of my own car in an emergency. The other

passengers did their best to ignore me as I coughed and growled and

gargled. There's that terrible thing with colds where you feel all sweaty and

itchy inside your clothes, and you think you must look like a monster. You

never look as bad as you feel, though. Only this time I think I must have.

I stumbled off *the* bus and made my way through the hospital car park.

The rain spattered down and people generally got out of my way. But as I

made my way up the shallow slope to the automatic doors of reception,

this pretty girl barred my way.

'Hi,' she said, with an accent from across the pond. 'Look, sorry, it's

really busy in there. You're best coming with me. We'll get you seen to

straightaway.'

I couldn't take my eyes off her, and as she led me round the side of the

hospital, I struggled to find something witty to say. 'You're from America?

Which part?'

'All of me,' she grinned mischeviously. 'And America is the tip of the

iceberg compared to where I've been. Come on. Try a phone call.'

I've heard of NHS Direct, so guessed the blue box outside the surgery must be some sort of back-up. I must have been looking really unwell, because the girl appeared anxious to get me out of sight and pushed me rather roughly through the door.

'It's all right,' she said. The Doctor will see you now.'

'Dear, oh dear,' the Doctor said. 'What have you brought me here, Nurse Brown?'

'I'm seeing things,' I stammered.

The Doctor laughed. 'No, your eyesight seems perfectly adequate. It's just that the box you entered is rather bigger inside than outside.'

Actually, I hadn't noticed that. Good use of limited space. 'I meant your coat,' I say. 'Shouldn't it be white?' My eyes could barely take in the sickening jumble of bright colours.

The girl patted me on the back. 'Don't worry, we're here to help. Doctor, the mutation is pretty advanced.'

'And worsening as we speak.' He scrutinises me, like I'm some fascinating specimen pinioned under a microscope. It's like his eyes are burning through my skull. No, it's just I'm getting a bit of a migraine. Next thing I know they're both trying to keep me up on my feet.

'Get him over to the couch,' says the Doctor to Nurse Brown. There's a light in my eyes while he looks at my pupils, and then he asks me my

name.

I opened my mouth to answer and realised I had no idea what my

name was or where my left tentacles had gone. The right were fine, but I

had some fleshy piece of meat on the left, split into five feebly wriggling

ends.

'His right arm has mutated completely,' says the Doctor. 'Now listen to

me, you must pay attention.' I'm gazing at the wondrous splendour of his

coat, all amazing, infra-black colours that I've never seen before. 'You have

caught an alien metomorphitic infection,' he tells me. I try to nod, to show

I understand, which is silly because I really don't. 'Part of the Wafti clan

colonisation programme,' he went on. 'I managed to eradicate it from the

atmosphere but one or two people were infected. They died.'

'What does he mean?' I ask the nurse. The words don't come very

easily.

'You're turning into one of them,' says the girl in a helpful sort of voice.

'You have to listen to the Doctor. He can help you, he's learned from the

others, he'll get it right this time.'

'Am I going to die?' I ask. I'm thinking I should have gone private.

The Doctor eyed me up and down, thought for a moment, then said

heartily, 'I don't think so. If I'm wrong, you'll be the first to know. The

way I see it, we've got two options. You complete the transformation into

a Wafti or we turn you back into a human.'

'Yes, turn me back. Please!'

'There's something I should explain first. It's very important...'

The girl cried out. 'Hurry Doctor, his spine is sprouting wings and his

ears are different colours.'

I tried to lick my dry lips but I couldn't make my mouth work. Then my

tongue shot out like a flick knife. I prodded the air with it. Nothing. Pity, I

could have murdered a fly.

Too late for words,' said the Doctor. He injected me with something

and I passed out.

I came round to the sight of the Doctor beaming down at me with his

peculiar, alien face. We caught it!' he said, and whipped out a mirror

from behind his back. I blanched at the sight of myself. Talk about shock

treatment. I looked like spaghetti bolognese.

'I thought you were going to turn me back!' I said, with a voice I didn't

recognise, i can't get married looking like this!'

'You're getting married?' Nurse Brown looked as amazed as my mother

had.

'One day,' I faltered. 'I hope. If I meet someone.'

Again, Nurse Brown looked like my mother had.

The Doctor was getting impatient. 'Let me explain. You have two choices.

You can go back to Earth where the atmosphere will interact with the Wafti

DNA in your body and complete the transformation, or...'

I waited. With my new eyes, I could see that he and the nurse were

very different creatures. Two hearts beat inside his chest, pumping very

different blood.

'Or,' he went on. 'You can go to a planet with an atmosphere suitable for

humans but which won't react to the Wafti DNA where your body can fight

the infection and you will revert to your human form.'

'Sounds okay.'

'Good. Peri - the details please while I program the TARDIS.'

Nurse Brown - Peri - settled down to tell me the bit that really mattered.

'You can never return to Earth as the infection will stay in your body. If you

go back you'll change into a Wafti forever.'

'Don't worry,' the Doctor's voice boomed from behind what I think was

an ice cream maker. He pulled a lever. 'The TARDIS will find somewhere a

human being fits in. Somewhere multicultural.'

So here I am, thanks to the Doctor's life-saving treatment, sitting in a bar

with a mate called Visnot who has two mouths and drinks twice as much

as I do per round. Fortunately, I can afford it. Far from being multicultural,

here I stick out like a sore thumb. I'm the only being that's remotely

humanoid: in this world I am a total alien. But unlike an alien on Earth

I am not pelted with rocks, kicked up and down the street, arrested for

acting suspiciously, mistaken for Lord Lucan or accused of taking all the

jobs. The people of Boor-Boori Alpha One regard me as the funniest thing

since sliced bread - a concept I explained in one of my first conversations

on arrival, to thigh slapping hysterics. 'Imagine,' Visnot still hooted,

'buying a loaf of bread, opening it, and finding someone's been there and

sliced it up!'

I am the darling of chat shows, doyen of panel games, star of Frighten

Your Neighbour (a sort of reality TV show where I turn up in someone's

kitchen and see whether they have a heart attack) and a wow on the

alternative comedy circuit.

I got it so wrong on Earth! Me? One of the crowd? I'm a star! If my

mother could see me now. And do you know, Mum was wrong about me

never getting married. I shyly catch Visnot's eye and hand it back to her. It

winks before I do so. What a girl!

I thank the Doctor every day for changing my life. And you know what?

The NHS is the best health service in the universe.

Those Left Behind

Violet Addison

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with K~9

It began with an empty school desk. I remember looking at that ominously

empty chair and wondering where Susan Foreman could be. Maybe

she was ill, or possibly her Grandfather had kept her at home again, or

perhaps what she had always feared had finally occurred.

I knew how scared Susan was of being made to leave. She had once told

me that all she wanted was to stop travelling and to find a place to call

home. Yet she knew it would never be; she was always so terribly certain

that one day her Grandfather would force her to move on again.

So when Susan did not arrive for registration, and with my history lesson

cancelled due to Miss Wright's absence, I pulled on my coat and headed

off towards Susan's house. When I arrived, I had to pull my address book

out of my satchel to check that I had come to the right place. I could easily

decipher Susan's neat handwriting, but where the house should have

stood there was only a pair of old wooden gates, which bore the simple

painted letters I.M. Foreman. Scrap Merchant. Then, out of the corner of my

eye, I spotted Mr Chesterton's car. The vehicle sat by *the* kerb, facing the

gates, a damp parking ticket fluttering beneath its windscreen wiper. The

schoolyard had been rife with whispered rumours about Mr Chesterton

and Miss Wright being seen leaving school together *the* previous night,

particularly since neither of them had turned up for school the next

morning. But why had they come to see Susan? The worry and nausea

in my stomach now grew into panic and fear. I knew something had

happened. All three of them had been here last night, and now all three of

them were missing. I knew I would never see Susan Foreman again.

A sensible girl would have gone home or found a policeman, but I was

overwhelmed by *the* need to know what had happened. So, going against

all the advice my mother had ever given me, I put my hand against *the*

gate and pushed it open. Behind *the* entrance was a world of forgotten

treasures. Old prams, broken mannequins and even an incongruously

placed police box cluttered-up the dark space. I heard *the* sound of a shoe

scrape behind me, and my spine went rigid with fear. I suddenly realised

that nobody knew where I was, and that 15-year-old schoolgirls weren't

supposed to go wandering alone at night into strange and dark places

in search of missing people. I turned, expecting - hoping - that it was

Mr Chesterton, Miss Wright, Susan or even her temperamental, sharp-

tongued old grandfather. But it wasn't.

'Hello,' said the grinning, curly-haired stranger as he held out a bag of

orange, yellow and green sweets. 'Would you like a jelly baby?'

'My mother always told me to never take sweets from a stranger,' I whispered, my voice dry with fear.

'Very wise,' boomed the tall man with a suddenly serious face. He pointed a jelly baby at me, as if it might somehow be threatening gesture.

'You shouldn't be in here, you know. I should report you to the police; you're trespassing.'

'So are you.'

'Ah, good point. It's probably best if neither of us mention it to them then.' The strange man popped the jelly baby into his mouth, it is getting late, though. You should be hurrying home. Go on, hurry along home.'

The tall man turned away dismissively and swept across the yard towards the police box, trailing his extravagant multi-coloured scarf behind him.

His words had felt like a challenge, as if he were daring me to find the courage to defy him.

I stood still.

He paused for a long moment by the door of the police box, before suddenly turning his powerful gaze towards me.

'You're not very good at hurrying, are you?'

'I'm looking for Susan.'

The man stared at me with big, wide eyes. He opened his mouth to speak, but then reconsidered and closed it again. He turned away from

me, so rather than his face all I could see was the wild mass of his brown

curly hair.

'She's not here.' He suddenly wheeled around to face me, dashing

forward until we were nose-to-nose. 'Anyway, what business is it of yours

where she is?'

'She's my best friend.'

'Oh.' The man took a massive step backwards and rammed his hands

into his pockets, 'I see.'

'And it's my birthday. She wouldn't miss my birthday.'

'Ah.' His voice sounded dark and hollow. 'And what did you say your

name was, again?'

'Deborah. But she always just calls me Debbie.'

'She never mentioned you,' he muttered. 'At least, I don't remember her

mentioning you; although I wasn't always the best listener.'

'Really? Well she never mentioned you either. And I do remember.

And I'm a good listener. And I know her better than anyone.' The words

tumbled from my mouth, edged with accusation. 'Who are you?'

'Well, you see, I'm Susan's grandfather.'

'No, you're not. I've met him!'

'Oh. Really? I don't remember that.' The man ran a hand through his

mass of curls, which immediately fell back into disarray. Then he suddenly

shook his head, like he had been only half awake, and his face

suddenly lit

up with inspiration. 'Oh, well then, I must be her other grandfather!'

'You don't seem old enough,' I said, smiling despite myself, like this

was all a game.

'Unusual family,' he replied in a deep yet knowing voice.

'You're lying!'

'All right, yes.' He clapped his hands together, beamingly happy at being

caught out. 'It was probably the massive fib that gave me away, wasn't it?'

'You're not a very convincing liar.'

'Well, I've not had a lot of practice,' he replied, sounding hurt. 'Truth be

told, I'm the same grandfather.'

'That's ridiculous.' I shook my head, furious at this suspicious stranger.

'Tell me where Susan is right now or I'll get the police!'

'Oh, don't do that. It won't help at all!'

The man suddenly unlocked the door of the police box, stepped inside

and slammed it shut behind him. Irritated and angry, I turned towards the

exit, determined to get the police; but I was brought to a sudden halt by the

sight of the thing that was creeping through the gates into the junkyard.

I blinked. It was a spindly creature, about four feet in length with a dozen

multi-jointed legs, floating along the floor towards me like an oversized

daddy-long-legs. I watched, my mouth open in horror, as the monstrosity

light-footedly bounced over a rusty pram. I shrank back, letting a shrill

scream escape my throat, until my back was pressed flat against the police

box.

The door behind me was suddenly opened and a hand gently guided me

inside. I gasped. I was suddenly stood in a brightly lit room, where the air

itself seemed to hum with power and life.

'Friend of yours, is it?' asked the wild-eyed man.

'N-no.' Getting a single word out of my mouth had never been so

difficult.

'Didn't think so.'

The man gently let go of me and I stepped back, suddenly realising

that the room was too large to fit within the police box I had seen in the

junkyard.

'Go on, say it.' He sighed, while distractedly examining the fraying ends

of his scarf. 'They always do.'

'Are we safe in here? Can that thing get in here?'

'Ah. Good prioritising, Deborah.' He looked up at me, his eyes sparkling.

'Nothing can get through those doors. Nothing at all. Unless I open

them.'

'Who are you?'

'I'm generally known as *the* Doctor,' he replied, while walking around

a hexagonal desk in the centre of the room, his hand idly reaching out to

activate a single control. With a gentle electronic hum a panel in the wall

opened to reveal an image of the world outside; the creature's numerous

limbs were clattering uselessly against the outside of the police box.

I moved forward, intent on getting a closer look at the image, but

halfway towards *the* screen I tripped over a grey box that was jutting out

from underneath the control desk. A smaller grey box, with a red grille at

the front, rolled off the top of the box and crashed to the floor.

'Careful!' the man bounded forward, snatched the smaller box from the

floor and raised it safely out of my careless reach.

'Sorry,' I pushed the larger grey box out ofthe way, noting the K and the

9 stencilled on the side in bold letters. 'What is it?'

'It's my best friend,' he said, talking to the smaller box in his hand. 'Or

will be, when I've finished remaking him.'

'But, it's just a box.'

'It's a computer! A very complex computer. Far beyond the

comprehension of any mere 20th century schoolgirl.'

'But computers can't be friends. They're just objects.'

The man looked at me. His mouth was open, a retort almost spoken

but

retracted and lost in a heartbeat. He clipped the smaller box into the larger

body and stepped back.

'Oh, it's some kind of mechanical dog.' I said. 'Does it fetch sticks?'

The man scowled at me and turned his attention back to the screen.

'Forget K-9,' he muttered. 'Tell me, what are we going to do about your

friend out there?'

'What is it?'

'Well, judging by the body shape, I'd say she's a Heshrax,' he replied,

peering intently at the screen. 'An arthropod species that originated on

Hesper, in the Hyades Cluster. So she's quite a long way from home.'

'Is it dangerous?'

'Is a human dangerous?' he asked, raising his eyebrows inquisitively.

'Yes,' I whisper, struggling to comprehend all of this incredible

information. 'Sometimes.'

'Ha! Well, the same is not true of the Heshrax. They're a very pleasant,

fun-loving species on the whole. She must have been homing in on the

TARDIS last time I was here, hoping she could find help. We must have

just missed each other. Luckily, I picked up her telepathic distress cries in

the vortex.' He pulled a lever and the doors swung open. 'And I'm more

than happy to help.'

Hesitantly the creature manoeuvred itself through the door.

'See. You're not dangerous at all, are you, old girl?' He said, scratching the creature between the chitinous plates of its neck. 'Probably just got separated from a migration swarm, didn't you? Eh? Got caught in this planet's gravity well? Trapped on Earth, unable to escape. Oh, I know how that feels, you poor thing.'

Then the man spun on his heel, his fingers methodically pulling levers and turning dials, a manic grin on his face. I watched numbly as the doors closed and a glass column in the centre of the hexagonal desk began to rise and fall with the same regular rhythm as a heartbeat.

'What are you doing?'

'We're taking our Heshrax friend here home. It's only a few thousand light years. Oh. And don't worry,' he grinned, crouching down in front of me. 'We'll be back in time for tea.'

'Is that what she wants?'

'Probably. Sadly, we can't ask her directly; the TARDIS telepathic circuits have never been able to manage the intricacies of the Heshrax language. It's something to do with them having two separate brains; difficult to know what they're thinking because they're always in two minds about it. So, I guess we'll just have to see when we get there.'

The glass column slid to a halt with a gentle electronic ping and the Doctor bounced to his feet, grabbed his hat from the stand by the door

and

rammed it onto his head.

'So, are you ready for your first visit to an alien world?'

He didn't wait for my reply, his hand just pulled down a lever and the

double doors swung open. The junkyard was gone.

Outside the doors was an outcrop of jagged yellow rock, which

overlooked a lagoon of swirling emerald waters and crooked white trees.

The Doctor stepped out onto the windy outcrop, his hand firmly holding

his hat on his head, his long scarf flapping wildly in the breeze. Hesitantly,

I followed him, pulling my coat close around me as I hunched my shoulders

against the cold wind. Looking back, there was the impossibly large white

room, somehow inside the tiny police box. Behind the strange spaceship,

I could see the strange orange glow of two suns behind a blanket of wind-

driven scarlet cloud.

'Oddly, this is night time.' The Doctor whispered in my ear. 'Those

are just other suns in the cluster; but their gravity causes havoc with the

weather.'

I watched as the Heshrax squeezed herself out ofthe TARDIS, stretched

out her many legs and bounced off into the air. She was caught on an air

current, whisked upwards and away, disappearing into low clouds.

'Yes, she seems happy,' he murmured. 'I've always envied their ability

to fly; it always looks so much fun! They ride the windstorms to launch

themselves into space. It's a terribly dangerous and exciting way to travel,

although it is followed by a very tedious decade of just drifting through

nothing. Travelling by TARDIS is much faster. We often arrive before we've

even left.'

'Can you take me home now, please?' My voice was small and quiet

against the howling of the wind, but he turned to look at me with his brow

furrowed in concern.

'Oh. Are you sure? There's a whole universe to explore, you know. All of

eternity too. We could visit the crystal temples of Canopus, be there for *the*

signing of Magna Carta...' The enthusiasm in his voice slowly faded as he

realised that I was not being swept along with his excitement. He paused

for a moment. 'You know,' he said, 'they were good times. Me, Miss

Wright, Chesterton and Susan...' His voice trailed away to nothing.

'I'm not Susan.' I don't know why I said it, but I knew it was something

that needed to be said.

'I know.' The man raised his voice, partly so that I could hear him over

the screaming of the wind. 'She chose to stay on 22nd century Earth, you

know. Well, I say chose, but I guess I chose for her. It was for the best.

Probably.'

'She won't be coming back to Coal Hill School, will she?'

'No,' he replied, his voice deepening with seriousness and sincerity.

'I'll miss her.'

The man smiled sadly. He replied; but his words were lost on the wind.

The TARDIS landed in the shadow of a railway bridge. As I stepped out

into the dark, I could hear the rattle of a tube train, the bark of a dog and

the distant hum of an electric milk float; all telling me that I had arrived

safely home. I turned to look back at the curly-haired vagabond stood in

the doorway of the police box.

'One last thing.' He said, flashing me his broadest grin yet and pulling a

neatly wrapped gift from behind his back. 'Happy Birthday!'

He slipped the gift into my hands, waved goodbye and closed the door.

There was a dull thud from inside the machine, followed by a grinding

noise and the flash of the lamp on the roof as the big blue box slowly faded

away. I stepped forward and stood in the space where the police box had

once stood and looked up at the sky.

'Thank you, Doctor,' I whispered.

When I arrived home, I opened the door into the hallway and found my

younger brother stood staring at me with an open mouth.

'Mum! Dad!' he yelled frantically. 'She's back!'

My mother suddenly appeared in *the* kitchen doorway and bolted

towards me, scooping me up in her arms.

'You're alive, you're alive!' she sobbed into my shoulder.

'Where have you been?' My father glared at me through his spectacles.

'I was at a friend's.' I knew I could never tell them the truth.

My mother held me, weeping into my hair. I wondered how she would

have coped if I had accepted the Doctor's offer, how many tears would she

have cried if I had never come home?

Things change. People move on. Eras end. But there are always those

left behind.

I could never have left my family. Not then. None of us were ready.

Then I remembered the gift clasped in my hand. I tore frantically at the

paper, desperate to see what was inside. It was a picture frame, containing

a simple black and white photograph. Mr-Chesterton. Miss Wright. They

were stood by a bus and waving at the camera, laughing and smiling and

hugging each other. There was a tiny brass plaque beneath the photograph:

'1965'. They were coming home.

And while I knew I would never see Susan again, I also knew that she

was safe. Without the Doctor I would never have known that, I would

always have wondered and worried about what had happened to my best

friend. I would have viewed the world with fear, rather than with hope.

The Doctor taught me a simple lesson; to treasure what I have, but to let

the things I love fly free.

Evitability

Andrew K Purvis

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor, with Ace

The first time I saw him he was on the other side of the market, wedged

between Jonno's organic tomatoes and the hemp tea-towels. A little

guy, light suit, back against Zara's combi van, right knee supported on a

novelty umbrella.

He was staring at me. Hard. I actually felt itchy. His eyebrows were

furrowed so far forward they shaded his eyes, eyebrows expressive enough

to be prehensile. Other than that, the pointed ferrety face was immobile

except for his jaw, because he was solemnly transferring something into

his mouth at regular intervals.

The 'people's market' had been open for two hours now, just lead-up

time before the big event, and I hadn't had a bite yet Plenty of people

doing the pick-up-put-down-smile-at-the-nice-little-serving-girl garbage,

but no actual cash.

I wanted to see what the little freak was doing staring at me, maybe

pling him if he got in range, but I was serving a customer with male-

pattern baldness and male-pattern desire to ogle me, and I did need to

pay attention. A '74 two-seater car of mongrel breed and touched up with

house paint passed between us, whipping up an angry curtain of red

dust

and litter. When it had cleared, the little man was gone.

Around Alice Springs, Australia's infected navel, the sun does not beat

down. 'Beat' suggests a rhythm, with intervals in between. This sunlight

crushes. It tells you that the Earth owes you nothing, you are lucky to be

here, and you will not be missed when you are gone. And therefore it's the

sort of place that weekend eco-crusaders like my mother come for their

holidays, since they can delude themselves they are getting in touch with

the planet and doing something worthwhile.

There were two hundred here so far; patriots, freedom fighters, scions

of the planet, all together for the biggest protest of 1987 - the siege of

Pine Gap, the US base, the nuclear bulls-eye painted on our country's

shirtfront We hoped for a couple thousand more. I'd seen a lot of protests

go nowhere - been lonely at them, in some cases - but I had a feeling

about this one, and I was not often wrong.

'Hello.' It was the pervert, or whatever. He had a hat on now, and raised

it while he reclined on a rock as if it were a deckchair. And that was the

final proof right there that he wasn't a normal part of this protest crowd,

since everyone was so hung up on freedom and personal space most of

them probably negotiated with the toilet each morning. 'I'm the Doctor.'

'Oh, right He's the medical support for when people have a little too

much sun or red cordial or whatever else I'll be introduced to when I'm

older. 'I'm fine.'

'I know. That's not why I'm here.' His eyebrows surged at me again.

This - for no obvious reason - was a little scary. Covering, I cocked my

head to the left and pretended to think about that, while I gathered myself

and plinged him. And that's when I got really scared.

Because I didn't get in. I couldn't read him at all. And he just looked at

me, put something in his mouth, and said around it, 'So what do you call

it?'

I made an incoherent noise, two parts breath intake, one part rodent-

squeal.

'You're very powerful already, aren't you? Oh, don't worry, I've seen

people like you before. With your gifts, your talent. And you have to call it

something, I've heard spiking, slipping, pswiping. You as a class seem to be

fond of sibilants, I've just realised. Anyway what do you call it?'

I wanted to look around for my mum, anyone, I really did. But I couldn't

stop looking at him. I'd given up the idea that there was anyone like me,

except maybe late at night and I had dreams about that guy from the

show

with the talking car. Him and me, we'd be holding hands and levitating

and disintegrating Ronald Raygun in front of a million trillion cameras.

This is definitely not what I expected. And from out of nowhere - and

thinking about it after, maybe I really did get through to him or maybe he

let me in a crack - I had the thought that he gets that a lot.

'Plinging,' I said. I hadn't blinked in twenty seconds and my lips were

the only part of my face that moved on this first, shy, word, but then it

started pouring out. 'I call it plinging. It's stupid, I was much younger

when I thought it up, but it fits, because it's like the noise from those radar

screens? I can just... see things, in a wave. Where things are. What people

are thinking. What things look like on the inside. You know, pling.' Like a

moron, I actually moved my hands as I did the noise, blossoming outward,

as if that made it any more comprehensible. It seemed very mature when

I was seven.

He smiled. 'I like it. How old were you that first time?'

And then and there, I told him all of it. How I never lost anything, even

when I was two, and I didn't understand how it was possible for something

to be lost and people shouted at me until I found things for them and then

they either went away or went quiet or accused me of taking stuff.

Anyhow, I talked for some time, told him everything. I didn't even leave

out the bit with the dog, I just had to tell him, and the tears from that time

came again.

'Fascinating,' he said. And it was. I had his complete attention and I

would have done anything to keep his eyes on me. There was so much

behind those eyes. 'You are... You have a...' He began earnestly, almost

eagerly, but stopped. He shifted in his seat slightly and looked at me. Or

more accurately, and I have no idea how I knew this, looked at a point five

centimetres behind my skull and somewhere above my left eye. 'You have

a condition. Let's call it a condition, because that's got more gravity than

"gift", and "problem" makes it sound like a curse, which it doesn't have to be, not if you don't want it to.'

'My mother says that problems are opportunities in disguise.'

'Hmm. And, if you'll forgive me, I don't have to be a mind-reader to

know what you think of that little homily.' He was leaning forward, but

checked himself, and I saw him force himself to lean back. 'I have a unique

perspective on your life, and that's why I am here. Do you want to see it?'

'I'm sorry?'

'Do you want to see your life?'

In the end, he showed me. I didn't even have to close my eyes.

I saw me. Then-me. I was right there, as if I was looking into a mirror. I

was taller, my face thinner, and I didn't have a tan any more. I was wearing

green tights with a black t-shirt. My teeth finally fit inside my mouth. I'm

not fond of the lines, but so far I liked the future.

My perspective panned backwards. There were people around then-me.

I recognised Zara, of all people, as if I'd want that bitter, foul-mouthed,

cheese-stealing deadhead anywhere near me. She looked old, seriously

old, at least thirty. Her blonde hair was gone - not coloured, gone - and

her ears and lips were pierced in a dozen places with fat, chunky bits

of metal. That would have to hurt. There was another guy in grey (once

black?) shorts with a picture of a dog musically farting. Was that a grown-

up Mitchell? The others were a mystery. All of them obviously knew me,

since they moved when I did. But they did it quietly, carefully, a half-second

later than I did, and now I wondered if they really wanted to be close to

me at all.

I watched then-me walk over to a beach umbrella, stuck in the red dirt.

The brilliant-white radomes of the base were ahead of me, and I could see

guards behind the razor-wire fence making sure we could see them. You

could tell they were well-trained; the only obvious threat to them were a

dozen unwashed protesters with sloped shoulders, but they were just as

alert as if we were a tank battalion.

The only thing under the umbrella other than me was a mustard-

coloured fold-out table with a glass with ice and water on it, mostly the

latter. I sucked it down without looking at it, crunching the softened ice

clumps in my teeth, and closed my eyes. I saw the lines around my eyes,

deep ones, scary ones. They deepened, then relaxed.

Mercifully, the next bit got fast-forwarded somehow, but preparation

took ten minutes. What I was there for happened in the two-tenths of a

second after that.

I saw a movie once about powers a bit like mine, where blood came out

of people's ears when they got brain-fried. Silly, my dad said, cos there's

nothing to connect your brain and your ears. There was nothing like that

now, no contorted expressions, no blood. I just turned them off. One

second ago, they had husbands, wives, children, opinions, hatreds, loves,

and now they were meat.

I saw everything. Every single man and woman, inside and outside. Two

hundred, maybe more. Some in uniform, some in suits, some in T-shirts.

And four dogs, a turtle and a tank of fish, but I've never been one of those

people who sees footage of a disaster and only gets weepy when they see a

crumpled bit of fur in a corner. Two. Hundred. Humans.

Inside, there was only the sound of air-conditioning. Outside, there was

only the sound of flies. That sound fell as, one by one, the flies landed.

It finished. I was shaking. I wanted to vomit. It took me more than a

minute before I could raise my head, and I didn't want to see those eyes

any more.

'But it's the only w-' I began, but then his hand was around my elbow.

I didn't see it move.

'Nothing good comes from those words,' he said. Trust me.'

Blood boiled into my face. Didn't he know who these people were? What

they were preparing for, what they were capable of? Ten thousand facts

surged up behind my eyeballs, about greed and pollution and wars and the

fact that those people in there, right there, they were a part of it and

they

didn't care but I did. I did.

I was going to say those things, but I lost the will. I couldn't do it. Or

rather, I couldn't do it now because I knew that 'then - I' did and that 'then -

I' could keep on doing it. And he knew that. And I still couldn't get angry

at him. And he knew that too.

'Don't,' he said. 'Please don't. Nothing's immutable, everything's

evitable.'

Seventeen long seconds peeled away. There was the sound of cars

crunching over the earth, squeals of brakes that touched the ultrasonic,

shouts of welcome. Someone close to me ate an apple.

'How old am I?' he said quietly. The gates were gone; I looked inside his

head and made for the mindspace I thought should have been there, the

vistas I'd seen in a thousand other brains. But there was nothing like that

- he'd kept me out before just to protect me. I'm curling over and reaching

out, and there's nothing I can grab on to. Everything's too big. Colours

dip and soar over and under the visible spectrum in a hundred thousand

million billion trillion quadrillion permutations and you can see each of

them one at a time if you look why can't I hear people gasping running

throwing up can't they see what this man has in his head why can't I feel

my legs my godlcan'tfeelanythinglcan'tfeel...

Now there was a hand on my shoulder. It was his, and it brought me

back. I said two numbers, one impossibly small and the other impossibly

large for the appearance of the man in front of me. I forgot them as I said

them, but he nodded.

'That's right,' he said. 'Right on both counts. There's an I and there's a

me, so to speak.'

I didn't ask what he meant, but I looked at him again.

'I'm not, as they say, from around here,' he smiled, but the smile went as

deep as the thing I saw coiled around him and for the first time I noticed

how his skin looked almost as smooth and white as his suit. It looked

like he had skin blemishes, misplaced hairs, age spots, but that's not

what they were. They were embroidery. Added after the fact. For artistic

verisimilitude, as they said in The Mikado.

He reached into his suit, brought out a white paper bag, and offered it. I

looked at it, and I think the fear showed because he laughed.

'No, not poison. Spearmint fudge,' he said. 'From the stall over there.

Can't stop eating the stuff, have been all morning.'

I took some. It was good. Somewhere, over the Doctor's left shoulder,

there was an accent that I'd only heard on television, the sort that

breathlessly complains 'the bloke's done a runner, sarge'. The accent

seemed upset.

Time to go,' said the Doctor, shuffling his hat. 'Remember what I

said. And don't get the piercing, it's just another endless spiral of things

children do to rebel against their parents, and each generation needs to

appall the next. An arms race of disgust. Tattoos, then piercings, then

scarification, then inserts, then slipskins. You should see what they do

where I come from, where the process has really evolved.'

I thought about asking *the* obvious question, but didn't. I just followed

him and from the shape of his back he seemed a little discomfited by that.

Maybe the people he talks to this way usually just let him go after making

fundamental changes to their lives, what they are, who they think of

themselves as. I wonder why.

'Who am I now?' I asked.

He stopped. He did it in the middle of a crowd of stalls, and three people

almost fell over him before they gave him looks and moved on. They gave

him the sort of looks that made me think that it's a good idea that what I

could/will do wasn't more common.

'I'm sorry, what did you say?'

'Who am I now? Before, I was going to grow up and kill two hundred

people. Probably more, I felt pretty mad. I don't think I was going to

stop

when they caught me either. I wasn't going to, was I?'

He looked at me for a long time. Somewhere to my left, I became

increasingly aware of the smell of barely-refrigerated goat's cheese. The

goat probably wasn't in good shape.

'No.'

'So could you tell me who I am now? And before you tell me that it

doesn't work like that, that you'd be breaking the Laws of the Universe,

why don't we assume that being increasingly disappointed and bitter

towards life is what led me to be who I was, and I'm going to get really

bitter and disappointed if I don't even have a teeny clue that things might

be okay and even if I'm going to die an early death or something painfully

ironic like in the short stories I read that would really suck but at least I'd

know and I could keep that in mind?'

The second sentence was one breath, said in the time I saw him start

to lower his eyes and his hand start to move, palm out, towards me. He

looked from me to his hand, and back again. Then he smiled, and it was

as if every smile I'd ever seen in my life was practice for seeing this one - it

had surprise and joy and respect and at least three different types of love,

not just for me but for everything.

'How about a compromise,' he said. 'You're right, there are rules, but

there are also subsections and subparagraphs and subsubparagraphs

and delightfully, deliberately ill-defined terms. How about I let you sense

the feeling you will have as you live your life now - most of the time,

anyway?'

And even though he was gone when it was over, and I only saw him once

more after that, it was worth it.

£436

Nick May

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Peri

'You ain't never gonna drive for no firm round here. I will see to that - an'

that's a promise, innit? When I'm done wit' your name you won't be able

to hire a pedalo on no boatin' lake.'

And with those words, I was out on my earhole.

Fair play, I can see Raff s point of view - 436 quid is a fair whack, more

than any one of us banks in a good weekend, especially at the moment.

Normally, I'd agree with him, normally I'd know better. But this wasn't

normal. Far from it. Which is how come I left: the meter running. Which is

how come I got *the* elbow.

Without sounding like one of them Police, Camera, Action shows on the

telly, Tuesday started out normal enough. It's market day, you run a few

old dears back and forwards with their shopping and they always tip,

and I also got an airport run. They're easy money those, and few and far

between at the moment. People going missing on the beach isn't good for

business. The brother-in-law says he might have to shut up the guesthouse

if it carries on like this. Few young people get themselves killed and it's

like the whole place has died alongside 'em.

So when some bloke comes haring off *the* pier with a pretty girl in tow and tells you to drive, you just drive. My only thought is that he's punching well above his weight. Must be the fancy clothes. I pick up my radio and call in.

'This is Four, Sonia love. POB at the pier going to...' I glance up at him in the rear-view mirror. 'Where to, mate?'

'The source of the distress signal,' the bloke butts in. He checks the gizmo in his hand. 'It's faint but still oscillating, so the signal bounce amplification has gone and we should be getting a truer reading... '

'Say again, Car Four?' says Sonia from the speaker.

The bird just grins at me - think she's a bit embarrassed. State of the fella, I realise she must be his carer or something. The bloke glances down at his gizmo again, then jabs a hand in front of me, pointing to the next turn-off. 'There,' he says. 'That way.'

'We're going up Revigo Avenue, Sonia,' I explain to the radio as I bring the cab smoothly round. I'm well used to last-minute decrees from the back seat - and how they're always my fault, an' all.

'You okay, Mick?' says Sonia.

'Fine, babe. See you soon...' That's our code for when *the* pick-ups are hard work. You'd think that would've cut me some slack later on...

And them two were weird.

All the time, the bloke just sat there, gawping at this thing in his hand

- like one of them palmtops all *the* City boys have. He was a funny geezer

- hottest time of year and he's got this fancy great coat on, a mess of

all different colours. Figured he must be some entertainer for the kids,

though we don't see many families on the pier these days. Only time he

ever said anything was 'left' or 'right' if the thing in his hand beeped. Girl

was a bit friendlier. American, she was - lovely figure. Long-suffering look

in her eye.

'You booked for the season then?' I asked.

'Season?' the girl goes.

'Shows,' I say back.

'What shows?'

'The pier,' I say. 'I just thought him...'

The girl takes a look at him in his Pied Piper gear and tries not to laugh.

The bloke glares at me.

'Since the art of conversation is clearly only just within your metier, I

think it would be best if you concentrated on driving.'

That's me told, I think.

His lordship tells me to stop halfway up Revigo Avenue. I can't wait to

be shot of him.

'Wait here,' he says as he scrambles out the cab. The bird gives me a

sweet little smile, like he's always this rude. I watched her hurry after

him as he strides up all purposefully to this house. He rings *the* bell

and they wait there for an answer, him hopping from foot to foot with

impatience. I wonder if he's on day release from somewhere and is late for

his medication.

And he suddenly looks back at me, bright eyes boring into my skull.

Like he heard what I was thinking. I'm gaping back at him, brain stuck in

neutral. Okay, looking back, maybe the girl had just told him off for being

rude, or he wanted to check I hadn't driven off. But there was something

about how he looked back at me, something in those eyes...

And then he kicks the front door off its hinges and runs into the house.

I'm thinking, What the hell have I picked up? More importantly, do I keep the

meter *running? I mean,* if the girl's paying, I'll knock the waiting *off* - *they* don't *pay* them carers much. Our Gemma does it up the old folks' home. Maybe *I* should *have offered to help with* him, shown some willing, but it's too late to do anything *now*.

Soon enough they come flying out of the house. They're running like the

clappers and carrying someone else between them. There's an enormous

bang from the house and a door flies out after them. Smoke everywhere.

The bloke yells, 'Drive!'

'Where now?' I ask.

'Just drive!' he snaps. His gadgety thing is broken. I pull away and

behind us the whole house explodes, raining glass and bits of brick and

wood down on where I'd just been parked. Sonia buzzes in - I'm missing

a run to the shopping village for this.

'When are you likely to be free?' she asks.

I look at the three of them - the bloke, the girl and this scared old lady

who looks a bit like Dot off EastEnders. They're all covered in foul-smelling

brown sludge. My seats are gonna be ruined.

Til let you know - over.'

'Stan,' the old lady says from the back seat. It's the first word she's

managed, poor old girl. 'Stan.'

'It's okay,' the girl says. 'You're safe now. Safe... '

'Stan...' the old lady says again.

'That wasn't your husband,' the bloke says, quite nicely for him.

That was part of the trap laid by whoever's behind the signal and the

decompression bomb in the airing cupboard.'

'Bomb?' Did I hear right?

'It speaks!' he booms. 'Yes - bomb. You have visitors in your little seaside

town and they have come from considerably further than... than...'

'Sudbury?' I offer.

'Sudbury.' He makes a face, so he's obviously been there.

'Stan...' *the* old girl says again.

'We'll find him,' the bird says again to the old lady and puts her jacket

on her shoulder as a pillow. 'Won't we?' she says to the bloke. The bloke

gives *the* old lady's hand a squeeze and smiles, and she puts her head on

the girl's shoulder and nods off. Once she's asleep, *the* girl looks at him

and he shakes his head. Nobody says much after that. It's me that breaks

the silence.

'Where are we actually going?'

The bloke opens his mouth and I prepare for more verbal, but he doesn't

start. The old lady's still asleep. He nods up the turn into Shakespeare

Crescent, a quiet little cul-de-sac since the council put up them bollards.

Leaving the ladies in the car, the bloke suggests we go off for a chat. I'm

on my guard, in case it gets nasty.

We go up the road a bit. It's quite posh up the Crescent, so me in a vest

top and him in his sludge-covered clown gear are going to stand out. He

doesn't seem bothered, but then I know he's nuts.

'What's your name?' he asks.

'Mick.'

'Mick.' He says my name like my bank manager does when he can't give

me a loan. 'Do you live here, Mick?'

'Yeah.'

'Has anything strange happened here lately? Anything at all?'

I know I'm going to regret saying this before I even open my mouth. 'We

ain't had as many tourists. Not since...'

'Since what?' he asks. Not sarcastic, either.

'People vanished. They'd come up to the guest houses and disappear,

vanish overnight.'

'Just disappear? No trace at all?'

'Some of 'em. They found one girl under the old lifeboat launch. Right

mess, apparently. Coppers down from London and all sorts. Something

weird about the body, they said. All got hushed up, but it's hit the town

hard. My missus' brother... He runs a guest house.'

'I see,' he says, and like he understands. It's weird, it's like suddenly I

would trust him with everything, where just a minute ago he was a loony.

Bet that's how he gets out on day release. 'Well,' he says, 'for his sake,

then, we need to stop this thing fulfilling its plan.' He puts his arm round

my shoulders and starts marching me back to the car.

'You know where you want to go, do you?' I ask.

'Back to the house,' he says.

'The one you just blew up.'

'That's the one,' he says, getting into *the* back of *the* car.

'But you just blew it up,' I say, squeezing in behind the wheel and

reaching for my seat belt.

'Yes,' he says. 'But it's been a good few minutes. The killer should be

long gone by now.'

As I start the engine, I tell myself that going back is a really stupid idea.

And you know what? I'm right.

The old lady's a bit more with it for her nap. Maureen, her name is, and she

seems quite taken by the bird, Peri, and this daytrip in the car. But most

of her house is now littered all over the street and in her neighbours' front

gardens. She doesn't say anything, but I can't meet her eye in my mirror.

I'd have started kicking and screaming, if it had been my home.

The place is crawling with Old Bill, so I park up by the crowd of rubber-

neckers and himself gets out of the car. He bowls up to the copper at the

gate and gives it the big 'un. For a minute it looks like they're listening to

him. One of the other coppers comes over, so I wind down the window.

'All right?' I say.

'He says you were here when the place went up,' says the copper. Doesn't

seem old enough to be wearing the uniform. Guess that says more about

me than it does him.

'Yeah,' I say, always happy to help with their enquiries.

'Well,' says *the* copper, like he's sorry it's got to be this way. 'I think you

should all come down to the station.'

'Sure,' I say, relieved to be able to pass this all on to somebody else to

deal with. I ring in to Sonia that I'm going to be a while, and then realise

that may just have been my one phone call.

Me and *the* Doctor share a cold cell at *the* back of the station, all sad old odours and dismal graffiti. He says he's called the Doctor, anyway, but

sounds to me like he that's just what he needs. Mad as a box of frogs, he

is. He reckons him and the bird found out about all this when they were

in outer space. He seems to know a fair bit about the vanishing people,

though, and I wonder if he might be the culprit...

They take him away to be questioned and I assume that's the last time

I'll ever see him. It should be a relief, what with all he's mixed me up in.

But I've always been a sympathetic sort and if I'm honest I've started to

quite like him.

And then he's back, and he's got the police hanging off his every word.

They've checked him out and apparently he's some kind of trouble-

shooter consultant working for the government. Kind of like The X-Files

in fancy dress. I can't help laughing when I realise that this Doctor's now

giving the police their orders.

We meet up with Peri, who looks like she's had a hard time of

it. Maureen's been taken up the hospital for shock, which is hardly

surprising. I pop in and see her even now, poor thing. But anyway, it's me

and Peri and the Doctor, all in the police station and all free to go.

'If you don't need me...' I hint.

'What?' says Peri. I hate the way she looks at me.

'It's just that... '

'I'm off to the path lab,' says *the* Doctor, looking sternly at me. 'Why

don't you get a cup of tea? I'll find you when I need you.'

Before I can answer, he and Peri are off down the halfway. I could just

turn on my heel and be gone. But instead I grab a cup of something from

the machine. Maybe chicken soup, but I wouldn't swear to it. I flick

through *the* old papers and magazines, ignoring *the* small voice inside me saying just to clear out. Like I say, I'm a sympathetic sort and I know the

Doctor's trying to help all of us. He said we had to help my brother-in-law,

and the rest of the town. And no, I don't know what or how, but I'm going

to do my bit.

Doors bang and in they come, looking serious. The Doctor shows me a

bit of old paper, an address scribbled down in handwriting like something

out of a period drama. It takes a moment to make sense of the loops and

flourishes and see it's the address of the waterworks, out in *the* industrial

estate.

We hurry out to the car, and he explains that Maureen's husband worked

for the water board. And he must have stumbled on this thing. Peri asks

the questions so I didn't have to, and could concentrate instead in getting

us quickly across town.

'But why would an Algernon' - I think that's what she says - 'be hiding

in the water works?'

The Doctor snorts like he hasn't any clue. And then he grins. 'Silt!' he

says. 'It needs silt!'

'We're just off this next road,' I tell them, though I'm not sure that they

heard.

'The creature is living off proteins from the sea,' *the* Doctor goes on.

'Those poor people!' says Peri.

'I'm afraid so. Only the water's diluting its food sources and it needs

concentrated protein matter.'

'Here we are,' I say, pulling up outside the Portokabin office that

leads into the complex of warehouses and industrial-looking buildings.

The place is in uproar - people running about, klaxons: the works. Just

opening the door of the car, there's this sudden whiff of something really

not right at all. My skin prickles with terror, and I realise what I can smell

is something like a Sunday roast.

'It's been eating people?' I manage to say.

'Oh, yes,' says the Doctor as he clambers from the car. 'You lot are a

handy little bag of food till the creature can find enough viscous mineral-

rich protein to sustain itself or get rescued! And Maureen's late husband

seems to have interrupted its plans for quite a feast!'

It's easy to find where we're going, because it's in the opposite direction

to everyone else. People in hard hats and overalls batter past us, shouting

that we're going the wrong way. No one will stop to talk to the Doctor, so

instead he has to go through the files in reception to work out where we

need to be.

Once he's found what he wants, he grabs Peri's hand and pelts up the

stairs. She grabs mine and we run like Red Rover at school, only we're

trying to dodge people, not catch them.

We find our way into this noisy control room. Steam everywhere - it's

like a sauna with disco lights. In the middle of all this, there's a little old

bloke in a white coat and he's pressing everything he can find. The Doctor

lets go of Peri and makes a 'wait here' sign. He runs over to the bloke.

'Maureen sent us to say your dinner's ready,' he says.

The little man - Maureen's husband - looks at him briefly, then just

turns back to his work. The Doctor glances back at us, like he's never

before known anyone dare to ignore him. He turns back to the little man.

'I said -'

And Maureen's husband shoves gruffly past him to reach some more

controls. The Doctor tries to grab hold of the little man and gets thrown

across *the* gantry.

'Doctor,' shouts Peri, but I stop her from running forward. She'll only

get herself hurt. The little man - far too little to have just done what I saw

him do - turns back to the controls.

I tell Peri to wait and grab the nearest thing to hand, a fire extinguisher.

I run at the little bloke, ready to hit him, but he turns dead quick and belts

me. Next thing, I'm on the far side of the room.

The fire extinguisher lands miles away. I struggle to my feet, and by this

time the Doctor is back from the gantry. He heads for *the* machine, so I go

for the bloke.

Um... And that's when he turns into a huge slimy centipede thing and

scoops the pair of us up! Yeah, I was there and I don't believe it either.

I can see the Doctor below me, struggling in the thing's tentacles too.

He's a big man, and stronger than maybe he looks, but there's little he

can do. He's going to be the thing's main course, with me as the starter.

The Doctor yells at Peri and she runs for the fire extinguisher. I'm looking

down this huge throat, past rows of gleaming teeth. And my arms are

trapped in the tentacle, so there's nothing I can do.

The Doctor struggles and Ugly Bug nearly drops him, he's dangling by a

leg. Peri tries to chuck him the extinguisher but it misses him, smacks into

the thing's face and bounces back at Peri. The impact makes the creature

howl, and I wriggle and get both my arms free. Its tentacle squeezes tight

around me and almost makes me gag. I struggle to get free, but I'm being

lowered with agonising ease into the thing's snarly, toothy mouth. I seize

my chance and swing my legs hard, kicking it in the face. Total fluke, to

be honest.

The thing howls and drops us both. Now it's really hacked off and starts

coming after us on all fours, or however many tentacles.

I appear to be *the* one it wants most.

The Doctor lobs the extinguisher at me - perfect rugby pass - and yells,

'Down its throat, Mick! NOW!'

It's almost on me when I pull the pin and shove the canister right into

its gob.

The Doctor pulls me away. 'Be ready to drop on three! One, two...'

The bug starts to gag, its tentacles swirling at its throat, trying to get

purchase on the extinguisher lodged in there. It needs, I realise, someone

big and tentacly to give it the Heimlich manoeuvre. And then BURRRRRR

RRIUlRRiaiRIUaiRRPPPPPPPPPPPPP - BANG!!!

We get blown across the room, and lumps of monster go everywhere.

Picking himself up and skidding about in all the bug guts, the Doctor goes

to the machinery and shuts it down. Pretty soon, it's quiet. I'm just lying

there in all the slop, watching him. My whole body is one great bruise.

'Extinguished,' the Doctor says when he helps me to my feet. 'Mind you,

if that had been me, I'd have been pretty put out too...'

He laughs at his own jokes. I think I prefer him when he's being

stroppy...

I drive them back to the pier, before the police catch us up and we have

to do lots of explaining. There's a cool breeze all along the coast, like it's

blowing the whole town clean. I can't get the stink of burnt flesh and burnt

monster out my nostrils.

'So it's all finished, then?' I say.

'Not quite,' says the Doctor. 'There's a rescue ship on the way and they

aren't going to be best pleased to come 46 light years to find their errant

son has just been squished. I need to get up there and make contact. Bit of

charm and diplomacy.'

My face clearly says it all. He stops grinning.

'You can keep this as a memento,' he says, pulling a bit of alien out of his

hair and plopping it in my lap. 'Goodbye.'

He's out of the cab and dashing back up to the pier. Peri gives me that

cute smile of hers again and jogs off after him. I watch them go, glad to

have done my bit and relieved that it's all over. And then I realise.

'Wait a minute!' I yell after them, 'What about my...?'

But it's too late - they're long gone.

And that was that, unless you count not getting paid for a day's driving and

the whacking great valeting fee. The car looked like it'd gone toe-to-toe

with a muck spreader. You'd think helping save the world from hungry bug

things would count for something, wouldn't you? But the boss didn't see

it like that, and the police station wouldn't back my story up, so I ended

up out on my ear.

Best thing that could have happened if you ask me. UFOs and aliens

are big business. Since all that kicked off, I've had space nutters - true

believers, sorry - from all over the world wanting to visit the scene of my

close encounter. Me and the brother-in-law even run tours from his guest

house - he's spent a fortune on green lightbulbs for the bar. And then

there's the cable TV... it's all UKTV Living and blokes with names like

'Trent' or 'Denver' from America wanting to do interviews.

'What do you say to people who think aliens don't exist?' they ask me.

Stupid question. Of course they do - I've got the bank balance to prove it!

Time Shear

Steven Alexander

An adventure ofthe Fourth Doctor, with K-9

On most days, the lonely old spinster from the end of the terrace watched

television from her comfy armchair, while the wooden clock on the wall

ticked her life away. Today, however, Miss Richards was entertaining a

visitor.

Andy Buller was her privileged guest. At 36 he was a self-made man

- and what a man he was. He was halfway through fitting an exciting and

modern alarm system for Miss Richards. He sincerely hoped that he could

persuade her to pay £900 for it.

This is great fruitcake,' he commented, stuffing a third slice into his

mouth.

'Cake making is simple, really,' said Miss Richards, straightening up

in her ancient armchair. 'All you need is a good recipe and the patience to

follow it religiously, Mr Buller.'

'Please, call me Andy,' he said as he cut a few wires at random. 'I feel

I've done you a real service. I'm sure you've noticed all the hoodies lurking

about these days.'

Andy knew she had. He'd been wearing a hooded top when he'd first

spotted her.

'Probably. Though you wouldn't believe what I saw on the street corner

the other day. A blue police telephone box like they had in *the* fifties! I

thought they'd all been exploded!'

What a tedious woman, Andy thought. One day, he'd get onto something

that would make him properly rich and he wouldn't have to put up with

this any more.

He'd noticed *the* headline on Miss Richards' newspaper, about a

terrifying armed assault. Those kinds of headlines did most of his work

for him, but it didn't hurt to drive the screws home.

'Police boxes are hardly enough. House alarms can be just as valuable

in protecting people from burglary. In fact, they can even be lifesavers for

older people. I've got statistics in my briefcase showing how important

they are.'

'I'm only 68,' pointed out Miss Richards, 'barely past retirement age! I

can look after myself.'

Andy looked for his briefcase, which had vanished from beside the chair.

He wouldn't look professional without a briefcase and he might not make

as much money. He searched frantically, but then something else caught

his attention.

'Hang on,' Andy asked, 'wasn't there a clock on that wall a moment

ago?'

'Not again,' said Miss Richards. 'I don't know what to do about that.

Sometimes there's my new clock on that wall, but that ugly old mirror

keeps coming back. I called the council about it, but they said I was losing

my marbles.'

'Yeah...' Andy was about to tell her exactly what he thought about her

marbles when he heard a vile hissing noise from the television. 'Did you

sit on the remote?'

An inhuman face had appeared on the television. Octagonal silver eyes

were set over the space where its nose should have been. Its perfectly round

mouth opened up and shrieked.

'That's new,' said Miss Richards.

To Andy's eyes, it seemed that the pink-skinned face was twisted in

rage.

The Doctor's face betrayed his excellent mood as he pounded the streets

of Bognor with K-9 in tow, tracking a spatial distortion. It was at moments

like these, with the sun safely in the sky and the heady scent of adventure

leading him by the nose into worlds of unknown wonder, that he could feel

the joy of universal excitement. Yes, even here in Bognor. If only he could

share the sensation.

'You know K-9, it's at moments like these, with the sun safely in the

sky... '

'Spatial distortion located, Master.' K-9's extended eyestalk was pointing

into mid-air. Everything in front of the dog-shaped computer was a blurry

mess. The Doctor rubbed his eyes, but the outlook remained blurred.

'Superb!' he grinned. 'K-9, I want you to wait here for 39 minutes and

four seconds, then come and rescue me.'

'Affirmative, Master.'

The Doctor took a deep breath and boldly stepped forward.

Inside the distortion terraced houses were elongated into unhealthy

shapes. The strain was causing brick dust to weep from cracks in the walls.

The path itself was crooked. In the distance, the Doctor could see himself

knocking on the door of *the* end house.

'My future,' he said to himself. 'So time is also being distorted.'

The door opened and the future Doctor saw himself being let into the

house. 'But nothing changes,' he observed of this future self. 'I still can't

walk through a door naturally.'

'What's this rubbish on the television?' said Miss Richards as she turned it

off with the remote.

Andy ducked as a gobbet of yellow goo spluttered and burst from the

wall. There was a slimy sheen on all the walls that he hadn't noticed before.

He was disgusted. The old woman's wallpaper was clearly disintegrating

with wet rot.

There was a knock at the door and Andy let Miss Richards get up to

answer it.

'Hello!' said the tall man with the wild eyes.

'Hello?' asked Miss Richards. 'Are you from the council?'

The tall man looked horrified. 'I hope not,' he said, striding into the

room. 'I'm the Doctor and I see you're...'

'Andy Buller, house alarm specialist,' interrupted Andy, furiously. 'What

the hell's all this slime everywhere?'

'Well, some say that these things just happen, but given the nature of the

yellow ichor that's dissolving out of your walls, I'd say it was time shear.

Could be nasty. Fortunately for you, I happen to know a thing or 15 about

time shear.'

'Then you should do something about it,' said Miss Richards. 'Perhaps

you'd like some tea?'

'I'd love a cup,' the Doctor said, looking up at the bulging ceiling, 'but

right now I think we should get out of here.' He darted back to the front

door as the whole room started to creak.

Andy tried to follow, but couldn't. His feet were embedded in twisted

metal as thick as a tree trunk. Miss Richards was afflicted too and she yelled in horror.

'Doctor! Help!'

The Doctor rushed over to Miss Richards. He took a stethoscope out of his pocket and put it to her forehead.

'Oh dear. It's mapping itself onto real space and you've been caught in it.'

'What's mapping itself?' asked Andy.

'Something metallic and about 40 metres long. Could be a weapon. It's going to have a devastating effect unless we stop it. Everything within five miles will be annihilated.'

What nonsense, thought Andy.

'Five miles?' Miss Richards shrieked. 'That's as far as *the* high street!'

'If the time shear goes critical,' said the Doctor, 'Bognor could be reduced to a crater filled with yellow ichor.'

'Who would want to destroy Bognor?' Miss Richards asked.

'Indeed.' Andy saw a new thought strike *the* Doctor. 'It could be an alien travel machine.'

'Oh, then it probably belongs to these people.' Miss Richards turned *the* television on with the remote.

The screen showed three pink-skinned aliens strapped into cockpit seats, two at the front, one slightly raised up behind. Their heads were

triangular and their eyes silver. Andy was amazed to see that they were

wearing unfashionable red checked shirts and blue shorts. The creature

in the back seat was clearly older, with a wizened silvery-green face. Andy

wondered why it was dressed in a tea towel.

'Of course!' the Doctor hissed. He leapt over to the TV set and started

to pull the casing apart. 'Large particles can't pass through the shear, but

signals from a visual transmitter might be picked up by a local aerial. And

if I reverse the output...' He pulled out a speaker and twisted its wires, i

should be able to communicate with whoever that is!' Triumphantly he

turned up the volume and distorted voices bellowed from the speakers.

Metallic strands were crawling up Andy's leg. His skin prickled as the

metal forced its way through his pores. 'Get a move on, Doctor!'

'Doctor calling unknown lifeforms, come in please.'

The camera zoomed in on one of the creatures. We are Vendrixi!'

'I'll tell you what you are...' began Andy, but the Doctor hushed him.

'We have conquered the Dragon, the Black Hole and the Corkscrew! Now

we have come to Earth for...' A sonic boom erupted and Miss Richards and

Andy clamped their hands to their ears. 'Oh Xzqran it,' said the creature.

'Help us.'

'No, help us!' shouted Andy. The sinewy metal was now up to his waist.

'Quickly,' the Doctor said into the speaker, 'what kind of engine do you

have?'

'Er... it's a Z70 Bellisima. Is that right?' The creature twisted its neck

right round to listen to the response from another alien, somewhere out of

view. It turned back to camera. 'Mum says yes.'

'Right, turn off your ship's computer so it stops trying to map your craft

around these two nice people. Then discharge the gorgotron valve into the

merbouliex regenerator.'

'Good. Is that all right, Mum?'

'Just do something!' yelled Andy.

'Sorry, sorry! Yes, I'll get on with it! Sorry.' The creature busied itself at a

control panel.

'I feel queasy,' said Miss Richards, metallic tendrils creeping up to her

neck. 'Are there going to be side effects to this? Only Dr Tudor says I need

to avoid certain foods.'

The Doctor jumped back to the speaker. 'Get a move on!'

'Nearly ready,' burbled the creature, 'I want to run a diagnostic...'

'There's no time!' bellowed the Doctor. 'Turn off your computer, then

shut down the Engrigifi converter. Do it now!'

The creature glanced around. 'Yes I heard him, Mum!'

Andy was gargling metal. It was throttling him and he knew he was blacking out. Stars appeared in front of his eyes, whirling faster and faster.

Then he was standing on board an alien spaceship. His legs were free and, helpfully, he found his suitcase back in his hand.

'What happened?' Andy asked.

'That's typical human thinking. Something happens and you immediately want to know what' The Doctor peered into Andy's eyes. 'Would it help if I told you that the merbouliex regenerator absorbed us into this ship's temporal field?'

'Probably,' said Miss Richards, leaning against a wall to get her breath back.

The Doctor strode up to the cockpit. 'Well done! Can I shake you by the hand, tentacle or feathered appendage?'

'Don't thank the boys,' said the older alien in the back seat. 'This expedition has been a disaster!'

'Mum's right,' said the young alien on the left. We were meant to be going to London, but I messed up.'

'It wasn't your fault, it was mine,' protested the one on the right. 'I was navigating. How could it be your fault?'

'Algh, Elgh, be quiet!' The mother slapped Elgh. 'I'll do the talking.'

'Are you space invaders or something?' asked Andy.

'Invaders?' said the old alien. 'No! We have come for your hotspots.'

'Canary Wharf!' shouted Elgh.

'The London Eye!' chipped in Algh.

'Elephant and Castle!'

Alien idiots. Andy wasn't impressed, but perhaps there was something he

could use here.

Miss Richards understood. 'You're tourists!'

'Yes,' said the mother. 'But after three miserable weeks in Bognor, I'm

starting to miss home.'

'Bognor's a great place!' said *the* Doctor. 'But your ship is on the brink

of annihilating the town. I take it you use *the* time shear effect to hide the

spaceship? And then you go gallivanting round disguised as humans? This

ship is in a rotten state, no wonder you're having problems. Still, a few

adjustments and it could be as good as new. And if someone as clever as me

were to make those adjustments... Well, it would be even better than that!'

The Doctor set to work on the controls with glee, causing the ship to

belch and lurch. Miss Richards steadied herself, recoiling as she brushed

against a red-hot cable plugged into the wall.

'Did you like Bognor?' Andy asked the aliens.

'Not really,' said the mother. 'Not enough hotspots.'

'I hate *the* place as well. I'd have been happy to see it turned into slime.'

'That's not very pleasant,' said Miss Richards, trying to intercede. 'I've

lived here all my life and found it a decent enough place.' She smiled at the

aliens. 'I could show you and your two sons around.'

'We could do with a tour guide,' said *the* mother happily, 'but I wouldn't

want to be in your way.'

'Well,' said Andy, 'your kids can stay in my North Bersted lock-up.'

Andy pulled a handgun out of his briefcase and shot the mother through

the head.

Elgh and Algh wailed in shock. The Doctor turned on Andy with a look

of fury. 'What was that for?' he snapped.

'I don't know what kind of madness this is, but I know my winning

lottery ticket numbers when they come up. I've spent my life ripping off

stupid old ladies with my sawdust alarm systems, but now I've really hit

the big time.'

'You brute, how dare you?' demanded Miss Richards.

Andy laughed. 'Old people are all the same, leaching our hard-earned

money when they've got stacks of cash squirrelled away.' Andy noticed the

Doctor shifting closer, trying to outflank him. it's not like you're using the

money. Or using your chances, Doctor!'

Andy elbowed the Doctor in the chest and grabbed Miss Richards' arm.

Then he turned to Algh and Elgh, who were cowering behind their chairs.

This was going to be so easy, he thought, i was saving up to buy myself a

villa in Spain, but when I sell you two freaks to the papers, I'll be able to

afford a beach house in the Caribbean. Yeah! Work on my tan, play some

golf. It'll be the cushy life for me!' Miss Richards struggled to break free.

'Don't bother, you old cow,' Andy told her. 'You'll just hurt yourself.'

'I'm only 68!' she cried.

'That's ancient!' laughed Andy.

'Ha!' spluttered the Doctor from the floor. 'I've reached 700 and life's

just beginning.'

Seven hundred years. Ten times her own life. With all the madness going

on, Miss Richards found it easy to believe him. Andy Buller had seemed

such a decent man, but he'd pulled the wool over her eyes with that alarm

system and now he had killed that poor alien. She remembered the red-hot

cable and saw that it was just in reach.

'Come on, freaks!' yelled *the* thug. 'Get moving! Or do I have to shoot

one of you as well?' He pointed the handgun at Elgh, who burst into

tears.

Bracing herself, Miss Richards tore the cable out of the wall and shoved

it at the thug's gun hand. The lights flickered and he screeched and fell,

while Miss Richards struggled free.

'You little...' he yelled as he got back up. 'Right. I'll just round up a few

mates. Then we're gonna smash you all up!' He ran to a porthole in the

ship's aft and started pulling levers, trying to get it open.

'Stop!' cried the Doctor. 'I haven't stabilised the fields yet!'

It was too late. The door opened and the erstwhile salesman leapt

out. His body was caught between two time periods, the right now and

the unimaginable future. It was as though he was being shredded by an

invisible sandstorm. His clothes fell apart, his skin shrivelled and his body

disintegrated.

'Time limit has elapsed,' said K-9. At *the* end of *the* road, one of the

houses had been demolished and replaced with a scruffy silver spaceship.

A porthole in the ship opened and the Doctor jumped out. 'Hello, K-9.

Where was our rescue? I expressly told you four minutes and thirty-nine

seconds!'

'Hypothesis, Master. Your inaccurate timing is a symptom of increasing

age.'

'Rubbish,' said the Doctor. 'Age has nothing to do with it.'

Elgh and Algh were rather cute, Miss Richards had decided. She had taken

it upon herself to console them as they wrapped their mother's body in a

steel web, ready to be buried in space. She had been delighted to discover

they had a device that made them appear human. 'Essential if you do a lot

of visiting,' Elgh had said.

Her house had been ruined and nothing would be the same again. Yet

she felt relieved. In among the wreckage she spotted her wall clock, which

she picked out and dusted off. To her surprise, it was still ticking.

'I've fitted your ship with a proper ESP invisibility field,' the Doctor

explained to Algh and Elgh. it'll give anyone who stares at it a bit of a

headache, but it's so much safer than hiding in the future.'

'We can't thank you enough Doctor,' said Elgh. 'Poor Mother. I'm sure

she would have liked you.'

'I can't imagine a higher accolade,' grinned the Doctor. 'Anyway, you're

all ready to go, we're all ready to go, so we'll be on our way. Goodbye!'

The Doctor put his arm round Miss Richards' shoulder. 'Come along, Miss

Richards.'

'No.' She shrugged the Doctor off and turned to Elgh and Algh. 'I have

a request, if I may.

'Of course!' said Algh.

'Anything!' said Elgh.

Miss Richards breathed deeply. 'Could I come with you? I can't replace

your Mother, but perhaps I can give you someone to turn to and rely on.

You still need bringing up.'

Elgh smiled. 'We think we should leave Bognor now. If you want to come

with us on our tour of the universe, Miss Richards, you'd be very welcome.

Next stop is Skegness!'

'Are you quite sure?' asked *the* Doctor, though he knew her mind was

made up. it's a strange universe out there.'

'I don't want to be alone and afraid any more,' said Miss Richards. 'I

think I'm ready for an adventure.'

'Ah-hah,' chuckled the Doctor, 'as my old friend Albert tried to tell

people, the trick to never getting old is just to keep on moving.'

Running on Empty

JR Loflin

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor

Annie's eyes bolted open, darting from left to right trying to determine the

source of the loud clanging. A quick glance at the clock on her nightstand

confirmed her fear. Her father had left for work more than an hour ago,

and she should be alone in the house. Even so, it sounded as if someone

was in the kitchen.

She pulled the covers back and eased out of bed, slid her feet into her

open slippers, wrapped herself in a robe for warmth and a non-existent

layer of protection, and crept silently towards the kitchen.

Someone was standing there, a silhouette illuminated only by a small

orange night light and a hint of gold around its neck. Annie usually found

that orange light soothing, but now it made the hair on her neck stand up.

The intruder, whoever it was, moved around the darkened room as if it were

familiar to them. She eased herself to the corner of the room and took hold of

the broom waiting there. She had no intention of confronting the interloper

unarmed. Returning to the doorway, she gripped the broom handle tightly

and with her other hand, flipped the light switch on. The broom

clattered

to the floor. Annie looked on in horror as her mother cooked breakfast for

her. Just as she had done every morning, until the day that she had died.

'Honey? Honey, wake up,' Johnny Hogan nudged his 13-year-old daughter

gently on the arm.

Annie's eyes slowly opened, taking in her surroundings. The mere sight

of her father was a comfort to her.

'Dad? What's going on? I thought I saw... '

'Your mother? Well, you did. Sort of, anyway. It's hard to explain.'

'Hard to explain?' She leapt to her feet, sending her father staggering

backwards. 'Momma's dead.'

Johnny frowned. He couldn't explain it, not really.

'All I know, sweetheart, is that when I came home from work, I found

you lying here on the floor of the kitchen and your mother in the laundry

room folding clothes. I know she's dead, but she seems to be getting

around pretty well.'

'Did... God bring her back to us?'

Johnny hesitated. 'I don't think she is back, sweetie. Not really. She

doesn't act right. She's here, but nothing seems to faze her. It's like she's

a zom... It's like she's asleep or something.'

'But how ?'

'I've got a hunch, but I need you to watch her while I make a telephone

call, okay? I need to cancel our dinner plans with Uncle Dave. I don't want

her brother to see her like this, not until we know what's going on.'

Annie nodded reluctantly. Her father's words made sense, but she didn't

know if she could stand to be in the same house as that thing pretending

to be her mother. If it was pretending, she thought. Maybe her mother

had returned to her, maybe it was a miracle. But how would you tell? she

wondered.

It didn't help that her father was treating her like a child. There's something

he's not telling me, she thought, like he either knows or suspects something, but

he's *trying to spare* my feelings. Even though she was a teenager now, she

didn't consider herself a 'big girl' by any means. She'd always clung to

her mother's apron, counting on her to be a shelter for her and a fount of

wisdom. She couldn't do that any more, particularly since her mother was

the source of her current fear and confusion. Her father wouldn't confide

in her, and it made her feel even more lost and alone than when she'd first

found out her mother had died.

She found her mother right where her father had said, folding the last

of the laundry into neat little stacks, just as she'd done when Annie was a

little girl. She'd watched her do it a thousand times and this time, at least

on the surface, didn't appear to be any different. It was as if she hadn't died

at all. Could she have been imagining everything?

'Momma?' she asked quietly.

Her mother glanced up, smiled and gathered up the clean clothes from

the top of *the* dryer.

'Momma, you were dead,' Annie tried again. 'How did you come back

to us?'

She gave no reply, but moved to stand in front of her daughter. She

smiled again, vacantly, and it took Annie a moment to work out what was

wrong. She was blocking her mother's path.

Annie moved aside to allow her mother to pass. The smile faded from

her mother's lips as she glided into the recesses of the house in search of

closets. The lights were on, thought Annie, but there was definitely no

one home.

Annie could hear the rattling of keys and the rustling of coats. She

glanced back down the hallway and saw her father approaching.

'Here.' He handed her the denim jacket her mother had got her for her

twelfth birthday.

'Are we going somewhere?' Annie frowned.

'Yep. I think I might have an idea where we can find out what's

happened

to your mother. She should be okay here for right now.' He glanced at the

den where her mother had begun to dust down the furniture.

'If you're sure.' She followed her father out to the minivan.

Annie pushed the door to Takahashi's Treasures and stepped inside, her

father following close behind. The shop held its usual amount of dust and

clutter. She'd been in the store many times, and it seemed as if the place

was never swept or dusted. She knew that wasn't true, she'd often seen

Risa - Takahashi's granddaughter - meticulously wiping down antiques

or mopping the hardwood floor. She wondered if she could be quite so

dedicated in fighting such a losing battle against the dust that overran the

place. Today, however, her friend was behind the counter, looking more

than a little bored. It must be a slow day for the dust, Annie decided.

'Hi, Risa. Where's your grandpa?' Her father's question brought Risa

out of her stupor.

'He's resting in the back. Is there anything I can help you with?' Risa had

a lovely smile - wide and very welcoming - above a strong graceful chin.

'Uh, no. I think I need to talk to your grandpa. It's kind of important. It's

about that necklace you sold me for my wife's funeral.'

'Something is wrong with it?' the young girl frowned.

'No, nothing like that... I just want to know more about it, I thought

maybe he could tell me something about its history,' he smiled kindly at

her, hoping to quell any suspicions she may have had about his visit. She

nodded politely and went into the back room to fetch her grandfather.

It was then that Annie noticed the small man at the far side of the counter.

He was perusing a box of knick-knacks, humming an unrecognisable

tune, and appeared totally oblivious to everyone else.

The man suddenly tipped his hat and smiled disarmingly at Annie and

her father. Maybe he wasn't as inattentive as he appeared. She smiled

nervously and nodded. The man's eyes seemed to focus solely on her now,

making her more than a little uncomfortable. She wasn't sure why, but

those eyes made her feel guilty, even though she couldn't remember having

done anything wrong. She'd had a teacher just like that last year, who left

her a nervous wreck whenever she was in her class. It was as if this man

knew everything she had ever done, and everything she was ever likely to

do, just by looking at her. Unsettling didn't even begin to cover it.

'Johnny Hogan, we have much to discuss,' a raspy voice wheezed as it

emerged from the back room.

'Hi there, Toshiro.' Annie's dad waved sheepishly as the old man

emerged from the back and waddled over to the counter. He never did

completely recover from that hip replacement he'd had three years ago.

Now that Annie thought about it, that was when she'd first met Risa and

her grandfather. It was shortly after her mother had first been admitted

to *the* hospital for testing. Her father had needed to confide in someone,

and *the* older Asian man was well suited to *the* role. He listened patiently as her father poured his heart out to him, offering no platitudes or advice,

only a sympathetic ear for his troubles. Annie also had no one to talk to,

so she had struck up a conversation with Risa. As it happened, Risa's

grandfather wasn't the only one with a talent for listening to people's

problems. Since then, they had visited Mr Takahashi's shop frequently, not

only as patrons, but as friends.

The little man who had been studying Annie so intently doffed his hat

and smiled at the proprietor.

'Johnny,' Toshiro Takahashi took no notice of the little man, 'Risa

should not have sold you that necklace.'

'I'm sorry, I had no idea. It had a price tag on it...'

'A mistake, she had no right to sell it to you! It is a family heirloom.

Priceless!'

'If it can do what I think it can, then you're definitely right.'

The little man's eyes sharpened their gaze at Annie's father, and she

could almost feel the man's eyes boring into the side of her own head.

'This necklace,' the little man asked, is it gold, with an emerald green

jewel embedded in a circle for a pendant?'

Both Mr Takahashi and her father turned to stare in awe at the little man

and asked him the same question. 'How did you know?'

'Because it isn't yours. I lost it a long time ago, in Shibuya.' The little

man made for the door, motioning for everyone to follow.

Annie's father kept glancing back over his shoulder at the strange little

man, who had introduced himself as the Doctor on the walk out to the car.

Mr Takahashi, for his part, looked grumpily out at the road ahead of them

as it rolled past.

'Some time ago,' said the Doctor. 'I visited Japan. I encountered what the

locals had assumed was an Oni - a demon. It was just a visitor, out of fuel

and stranded, and I managed to help it on its way.'

'It was... an alien, wasn't it?' her father asked.

The Doctor smiled. 'What makes you say that?'

'Because it left that thing behind. The necklace.'

The Doctor's eyes narrowed, but he did not confirm or deny the

possibility.

'You're an alien as well?' Her dad glanced back worriedly. Mr Takahashi

took his eyes off the road only long enough to roll them in disbelief.

'Yes, sorry,' the Doctor smiled in what he probably intended as a

comforting manner.

'Nah, it makes sense,' her father shrugged. 'Aliens, dead people walking

around, it makes perfect sense.'

'Dead people?' Takahashi's eyes forgot all about *the* road and decided to

look rather worriedly at the Doctor.

'The pendant is a power cell,' the Doctor explained. 'Just a battery, but

one designed to work with lots of different machines. And I suppose a

human being is a kind of machine.'

'But why my wife? She's dead.' Annie wanted to reach forward, to hug or

hold her dad. But she couldn't; not when he was driving, and not in front

of all these people.

The Doctor considered. 'What's she done since she came back to life?'

'Erm... cooking, cleaning. Just the usual stuff.'

'Things she's done day after day, for years on end. They're instinctive.

She has none of the personality, none of the intelligence she had in life.'

'Nonsense!' Takahashi declared.

'Really?' the Doctor glared at him. 'Did your family ever tell you about the

necklace? Did they tell you it had "magical" powers and to look after it very carefully? You seemed very upset when you found out your granddaughter

had sold it.'

Takahashi fumed, but offered no reply.

'So my wife isn't...?'

The Doctor put a hand on her dad's shoulder. 'She isn't her. Not really.

The woman you love is dead.'

'Is she dangerous?' Annie could see *the* fear in her father's eyes.

'I shouldn't think so. Your wife is running on her past programming,

everything she learned during her life. If she never harmed anyone before,

she wouldn't do so now.'

Despite *the* Doctor's reassurance, her father pressed his foot down on

the gas pedal, hoping that this nightmare would soon be over.

Annie bolted out of the car as soon as they pulled into the driveway.

Whatever waited for them in that house, Annie had decided she should

face it head-on, not cowering behind her parents like she had done as a

child. She found her mother in the dining room.

Michelle Hogan placed the last plate of food on *the* dining table, and

tried to call her daughter to supper. No sound emanated from her lips.

Annie watched from the living room, and shuddered. That was her mother

in there, and yet it wasn't.

The others had followed close behind her and the Doctor, all of his

menace having melted into an odd reassuring presence, laid a comforting

hand on her shoulder. As she stood there, watching the silent echo of her

name on her mother's lips, Annie knew that it was time for her to move on,

to finally accept the death of her mother.

Her father, on the other hand, wasn't quite as ready to let go. He'd

moved to stand in front of his wife, who greeted him with a smile and a

light kiss on the lips.

'Isn't there some way we can bring her back?' he looked pleadingly at the

Doctor, tears swelling in his eyes. 'Some way to "fix" her, make her "work"

again? I... I need her. Annie needs her.'

The Doctor moved to intervene, but it was Annie who took her father by

the arm.

'Daddy,' she said. 'Momma's gone now.'

Her dad wouldn't meet her eyes, but looked round at *the* others until he

found the Doctor. 'I don't know if I can make it without her,' he almost

choked on the words. The Doctor gave no reply, just gave Annie a sad

smile.

'You can,' she said. 'I'll take care of you, and you'll take care of me.'

'It's not that simple...' he began.

'Oh, it's simple,' said the Doctor, it's just not easy.'

Her father nodded, defeated by the logic and love in his daughter's

words, and she took him in her arms and hugged him fiercely. Over his

shoulder, she could see the Doctor looking on with the slightest

twinkle

of approval in his eyes.

'C'mon, dinner's ready,' Annie broke the embrace, and led her father

over to his usual seat at the head of the table.

The Doctor didn't retrieve the necklace right away. He sat with Mr

Takahashi in the living room, talking quietly about the Shibuya of

Toshiro's childhood, and how technology could be both a blessing and

a curse, while Annie and her family enjoyed one final home-cooked meal

together, just like the ones her mother used to make.

Swamp of Horrors

(1957)-Viewing Notes

Michael Rees

An adventure of the Sixth Doctor, with Mel

Slogan:

The Animal Kingdom declares war on humanity!

Plot Synopsis:

New York scientist Derek Spire and his beautiful assistant Melody Malone

seek the Fountain of Youth in the Louisiana bayou. Discovering giant

creatures terrorising *the* locals, Derek helps the military in an epic battle

between man and nature. The mysterious Dr John Smith and his assistant

Melanie Bush both help and hinder the heroes.

Review:

A surprisingly competent film from film director Walter Fanik, subverting

many of the cliches associated with monster films of this era. The majority

of his films were made for Artificial Light Studios, who were happy to

provide a steady stream of low-budget B-movies to *the* drive-ins across the

nation. It surprised many in the business when Falk rejected the studio's

demands to re-edit the film, specifically requesting the removal of what

they considered to be a subversive message. To his credit, Fanik stood his

ground and the studio, not willing to let a film with such stunning

special

effects escape their grasp, relented.

The tides are shown over footage of a swamp, taken at dawn. Instead of a

musical score, we hear insects buzzing and birds singing. This is nature's

wake-up call. The last credit is for Walter Fanik himself and, as his name

fills the screen, something rises from the swamp. We only see it for a

moment, huge and covered in scales, before its massive jaws engulf the

picture and everything goes black. It's an effective hook for the audience,

and compensates for the lacklustre early scenes in New York University.

These scenes are a workmanlike introduction to *the* main character of

the film, Professor Derek Spire. Adrian Cooper shows little charisma as the

boorish Spire. Spire is the kind of scientist who only appears in these kind

of movies; square-jawed and athletic, he'd be more at home on a football

field than in a lab coat. Sheena Sown was clearly chosen for the role of

Melody Malone more for her looks and dancing ability than acting talent.

Even the sets are obviously poorly maintained painted backdrops, the wall

wobbling when the suitcase Derek throws at Melody strikes it.

Things improve once the film goes on location. In a series of

improvised

scenes with locals, Derek Spire attempts to locate the mythical Fountain

of Youth. The locals' unscripted responses are authentic, and chilling, as

they weave extraordinary tales of lights in the sky, strange deaths and giant

alligators.

Fanik clearly recognised the advantage of this documentary style and

incorporates it into the rest of the film, giving it a much-needed grounding

in reality. An example of this is seen during an early misjudged romantic

scene between Spire and Melody Malone as they check into an inn, when

the cloying artificiality is interrupted by a droning sound.

The camera is visibly picked up and carried outside to witness a swarm

of locusts the size of rats, blacking out the evening sky. Chaos erupts as

the locusts dive-bomb the town, smashing windows, knocking people to

the ground and even shattering the camera lens. The hand-held style is

particularly effective at hiding the film-maker's sleight of hand. Special

effects experts argue about how this effect could have been achieved.

A cutaway to the swamp at first appears to be a rather poor merman

wading through the water. It is clearly a man in a costume, as the zipper

is plainly visible and the sleeves don't quite reach the gloves. Sadly this

'monster' is typical of many of Fanik's earlier works.

In a surprising display of self-awareness that some critics have assumed

to be a clumsy breaking of *the* fourth wall, Walter then makes an appearance

as himself directing the scene, when the mysterious Dr John Smith and

Melanie Bush rush from off-screen and leap on *the* man in the costume in

a mistaken belief that he is an alien.

The roles of Dr John Smith and Melanie are not credited either in the

titles or the closing credits. This is probably meant to further convince us

that these are not actors but real people, and the trick works particularly

well given that these two actors do not seem to have appeared in any other

movies. Perhaps they are just so well made-up here we do not recognise

them. They are enigmatic characters, and the source of much critical

debate. During the course of the film, it is never made entirely clear who

they are supposed to be. Dr John Smith obviously possesses a large amount

of scientific knowledge, but he and his companion, dressed in a patchwork

coat and polka-dot jumpsuit respectively, look as if they belong in a circus.

Perhaps a travelling circus from England, judging by their accents.

The character of Dr John Smith is important, in that he provides a

counterbalance to the character of Derek Spire. While Spire has a belief

that science justifies his actions and gives mankind the right to master

nature, Smith preaches the wisdom of restraint and of maintaining a

natural order. Since the character does not appear in the original script, we

must congratulate the director for introducing this revolutionary role. He's

the archetype of many similar characters in the director's later work, and

represents a significant change in Fanik's moral philosophy.

Smith's importance to the plot is also significant, as he claims to be

trying to locate an alien signal from within the bayou. After what at first

appears to be a comedy interlude, the action returns to the town, where

Spire claims that his research showed that the Fountain of Youth would

give out a radio signal. Obtaining a radio set from a local, Spire and Melody

Malone head into the bayou, following its whining interference.

As they travel by boat, the viewer must endure an instantly forgettable

song performed by Malone, which the studio originally intended

to release commercially. The song is interrupted when the boat is

attacked by a 30-foot python. Adrian Cooper and Sheena Sown give

their most convincing performances yet. It's very courageous for

Adrian Cooper to dare show himself being so cowardly and foolish.

His ego was legendary, refusing to allow any character he played to

show any weakness. Famously, when playing the lead in David Owen's

adaptation of Romeo *and* Juliet (1953) he demanded script rewrites, and

not only lived, but ended up getting the girl. It is a shame that Swamp *of*

Horrors was his last film, as this could have been his breakthrough role.

Just as it appears the two will be swallowed alive, a high-pitched tune can be

heard, causing the python to recoil into the water. The camera spins around

wildly, to catch sight of a hunched figure slipping into the undergrowth.

Making camp for the night, Spire has a crisis of faith, yelling at the

heavens that he isn't going to continue this journey into danger. Malone

tells him to be quiet, showing a new strength of character. A tense scene

follows, as they hear something moving through the forest around them.

The tension is broken when a dripping-wet Dr John Smith and Melanie

Bush emerge. Explaining that their boat was destroyed by the local wildlife,

they settle down and warm themselves by the campfire. More of Dr

Smith's character is shown as he reveals himself to be deeply paranoid. He

complains that he is being watched and these mysterious voyeurs

should

leave him alone.

Dr John Smith proceeds to accuse Spire of being a fool, knowing

nothing of science. Rather than standing up for himself, Spire is stunned

by this personal attack. Melanie acts as arbitrator in the group, bonding

with Malone. Peace is restored as Melanie leads them through a series of

campfire songs. Even Smith puts aside his grievances with Spire to give

a rousing rendition of On with the Motley. It's a surprise the studio never

released these tracks separately.

In the morning, Melanie persuades Smith to travel with Spire and Malone

to locate the source of the alien transmission. Reluctantly, Smith agrees,

adjusting the radio Spire brought with them.

Continuing along the bayou, the foursome encounter a partially

submerged alien craft. Defying the relatively small budget allocated

to the film, the alien craft is impressive, bucking the trend for saucer-

shaped vehicles, instead presenting it as an 'organic' cone of surprising

complexity.

It is at this point that the whole plot about searching for a Fountain of

Youth is dropped. It is not surprising that Fanik instead presents us with

aliens from here on in. Smith himself explains why space invaders

were

so part ofthe public consciousness in 1957. UFO sightings had increased

dramatically, especially in New Mexico, and in Russia a dog was sacrificed

in the name of progress, as Sputnik II was launched.

Showing little scientific curiosity, Spire refuses to enter the craft, leaving

the other three to enter. Smith confirms that the craft is the source of the

transmission, a distress signal. A variety of empty cages are found, which

Melanie compares to a zoo.

Studying the cages, Smith decodes *the* alien text on them to reveal each

contained animals that are, or were, facing extinction. Rather than being a

ship of war, the alien seems to have been on a mission of mercy.

While Smith and Melanie study the cages, Malone discovers slices of

bread and, having lost their food supplies in the snake attack, tries a piece.

Before Smith and Melanie can stop her, Malone has passed out. Gravely,

Smith explains the bread is in fact what remains of the alien rations, and

worries what effect it will have on human biology.

At this point in the movie, the supposed leading characters are being

pushed into the background, and many have argued that Smith and

Melanie represent *the* natural progression of the roles performed by

Spire and Malone. With Malone unconscious and Spire out of the picture,

Jason Godden, famed film critic for *the* Baltimore Review, has argued that it

symbolically marks the director giving up the cliches of his previous work,

and striking out with a new kind of heroism.

A scream of terror draws the group outside to witness Spire pointing

towards the nearby trees. The camera catches a glimpse of a hunched

figure, dashing back between the thin trees that line the water's edge. Spire

then passes out with a splash. Spire later claims that he was knocked out by

the alien's ray gun, and not through cowardice, as Dr Smith asserts.

The next scene is set an hour later, when both Spire and Malone have

awakened to see that Melanie has been standing watch. Malone is stunned

to discover that she is now several feet taller. Clever forced perspective

camera angles are employed to provide this effect, and were so convincing

that even those who knew Sheena Sown claimed she had indeed grown

taller after shooting the film.

In another contrast, Smith has left Melanie to explain *the* situation,

confident that she will understand and be able to relate the information.

This is a departure from Spire always delivering his scientific explanations,

silencing Malone if she tries to contradict him. Professor Colin Barrydon,

author of Danger in the Drive-ins: Analysis of the B-Movie Genre, has argued that

though credible-sounding, Melanie's explanation is entirely nonsensical.

So it is Melanie who explains that the rations on *the* alien craft increased

the growth of animal life. Specimens on the craft escaped, consumed the

food and slipped into the bayou as their bodies increased in size. Malone's

transformation confirmed this theory for Dr Smith, who has now set off to

find the pilot of the crashed alien craft.

Heading back towards town, the group witness a savage battle between

the army and four giant alligators. Stock footage and miniatures are

seamlessly blended, as the alligators snap up several soldiers with a single

bite and swipe tanks aside with their tails.

After several minutes of being blasted, the alligators slip back into the

water and vanish from view. Spire approaches the General leading the

troops and points them towards the source of the trouble, the alien craft.

Ignoring Melanie's protests that they should wait for Dr Smith, the

military follow Spire's lead. Finding the ship, they destroy it only for

Dr Smith to appear, infuriated that they've destroyed their only hope of

stopping the menace of the alien creatures or of returning its pilot home.

His eloquence undercuts the action and the audience is almost made to feel

guilty for taking pleasure in the sequence. This, too, is a completely new

approach for the director.

Dr Smith explains that the animals were all electronically tagged and

equipment from the ship could have been used to deliver a shock to the

animals, forcing their bodies to return to their original size. Far from being

an alien attack, this was a peaceful scientific expedition that went horribly

wrong. Spire persuades the military that Dr Smith is wrong and they set out

to hunt down *the* rogue alien and its escaped menagerie.

This sets up the final section of the film, as the military hunt down the

alien, while Dr Smith, Melanie and Malone seek to prove Spire wrong.

Arriving in town, the trio meet Walter Fanik, making another appearance

as himself. Initially he is furious that a giant alligator has destroyed one of

his cameras, although the film it contained was recovered. Again, Jason

Godden humorously suggests in his analysis of the film that this recovered

footage was used for *the* opening scene.

Smith recruits Fanik and his film crew in assembling a structure from

their camera equipment, coupled with electronics supplied by the locals.

Seeing so many people working together for a shared goal is inspirational.

Consulting with a mysterious hunchbacked old woman who hides her

face, Smith draws up a blueprint for the structure, Melanie provides rapid

calculations that would put a modern-day computer to shame, and Malone

puts her dance training to good use, climbing between the network of

metal pipes to place speakers and batteries at specified locations on the

large structure.

The finished product is a geodesic dome covered with electronic

equipment of all sizes and shapes that wouldn't be out of place in a museum

of modern art. Smith is especially pleased and requests the old woman play

music to soothe the savage beasts. The woman proceeds to play a flute,

producing the same high-pitched melody heard earlier in the swamp.

The sound of music vibrates within the dome, swirls of light appearing

around it, not unlike the aurora borealis. It is only a shame that this was

filmed in black and white (Artificial Studios had refused to produce colour

movies, believing them to be a fad and far too expensive to produce). From

the reactions of the assembled townspeople and main cast, they certainly

appear to be spectacular.

Nearby, the army is involved in a battle with a giant snake when they hear

the eerie music broadcast by the dome. The snake breaks off the attack,

heading towards the source of the sound. Spire proudly asserts this is the

aliens' call to battle. Following his direction, much to the annoyance of the

General overseeing the operation, they head to the town and witness an

incredible sight.

Giant animals and insects writhe around the dome, bathed in the colours

being emitted. As well as the locusts, alligators and snakes we have already

seen, we also witness giant turtles, huge bald eagles and large snow

leopards among their numbers. The order is given and the army open fire.

The townspeople run for cover as the ground explodes around them,

and our main cast of characters are scattered. The turning point for Spire's

character comes when he notices that Malone has been knocked out by a

chunk of flying masonry. Realising the error of his ways, he rushes into

danger and shields her as an explosion occurs nearby.

When the smoke clears, the dead bodies of the animals have returned to

their original size. For a moment it looks like Spire is alive as he rises

up,

but then we realise it is only Malone moving his body as she struggles to

her feet from beneath him. Through his sacrifice, she has survived. A noble

end to Spire's life, even if he spent most of the film acting like a jerk. The

film's message is clear; it is never too late to prove one's worth.

Dr Smith lambasts the military for wiping out species of animal that were

thought to be extinct, and now are. He explains that not only did the dome

project a signal that the previously captured animals had been trained to

respond to, but the light it emitted was eradicating the alien substances

within their bodies, returning them to their original size. The General

retorts that he isn't concerned with the lives of mere animals.

The closing scene mirrors *the* opening of the film, showing the swamp

as *the* sun begins to set. We hear no sound now, only a wind that carries

smoke over the water's surface. It's a haunting counterpoint to the lurid,

B-movie thrill of that opening. There is no sign of life, only the dead bodies

of animals, and Spire. The last words we hear are from Dr Smith, taken

from his argument with the General.

'You say you fight for survival, but now that fight is over all I see are

creatures who are now gone from this world for good. You can't turn back

the clock. You don't have that luxury. One day, and that day will come sooner

than you think, you will only be able to show your children the wonders of

the animal kingdom in films like this.'

The screen fades out, leaving the audience to reflect on his words. The

final image is a memorial for Adrian Cooper, who died during a freak

accident on set.

This film proved a turning point for Walter Fanik. People read between

the lines of his movie and saw that he had deliberately made Spire so

pompous that the audience would know he was in the wrong, and that

the true message of the film was one in favour of conservation and open-

mindedness.

His subsequent films developed this subtext and made it more explicit.

Although not popular with the government, his movies were beloved by the

growing youth culture of the 60s and 70s and the ecological and political

subject matter has often proved to be well ahead of its time.

The character of Dr John Smith was also well received, and the film

industry, always one to duplicate anything that had proved popular, created

similar characters in other films, but none could agree what he should look

like. For example, a similar character appeared in Dinosaur Valley (1966)

wearing a long scarf and floppy hat, fighting lizard men in Texas, with

the help of some completely anachronistic cowboys. In El Toro Vs The Silver

Giants (1961) a much shorter, impish doctor assists the famed Lucha Libre

wrestler El Toro in defeating robots preying on the people of Mexico City.

It became an odd tradition that the actor who plays each of these doctors is

never credited for their role.

The ground-breaking special effects for Swamp *of Horrors* were provided

by newcomer Ann Allen, who went on to produce all the effects for Fanik's

films. Despite many requests, she has refused to reveal the secrets of her

techniques and is a recluse. To this day, no one has been able to give a

detailed description of her, other than that she has a hunchback.

Dialogue:

Derek explains his quest for the Fountain:

DEREK: Don't you see, Melody? The Fountain of Youth was real. These

fragments of pottery left by the Mayans confirm it, and what's more, I've

decoded their ancient code to determine its location.

MELODY: I'm afraid I don't know anything about maidens and their pots,

but if you've found a drink to make me pretty forever, count me in.

DEREK: This is no job for a girl! Well, I suppose I need someone to carry

my bags.

MELODY: Sure, boss!

Encountering the film crew:

DR SMITH: Black and white film? My clothes were made for Technicolor!

MELANIE**:** Should we really be appearing on film? What if I see it? You know

with my memory I'd never forget my lines - even before I'd said them!

DR SMITH: Oh don't worry about that Mel. The web of time ensures such

trifling details are taken care of. Did you ever see this film?

MELANIE: Well, no.

DR SMITH: There you are. We're free to do and say anything we want.

Derek and M e l o d y are attacked by a *giant snake:*

DEREK: Arghh! Don't eat me, take the girl! Take the girl!

MELODY: Why you low-life piece of... (A piecing screech drowns out the

rest of her sentence).

Melanie and Melody speak around the campfire:

MELANIE: SO why are you with Derek? He obviously doesn't respect you.

MELODY: I just wanted to be famous, but that doesn't seem so important

right now. I just want to make it out of this alive.

MELANIE: YOU know there are things that make you feel better than fame.

Try saving the world a few times, and you'll see what I mean.

After Dr Smith claims the alien is stranded and peaceful:

DEREK: Everyone knows aliens are communists. Who are you going to

believe, General? Me, or this commie-loving beatnik?

DR SMITH: Communist? Are you seriously claiming that all alien life

subscribes to the same political agenda? General, the signal that was being

transmitted from the ship was clearly a distress call. Who starts any kind of

an invasion by first calling out for help?

DEREK: The sneaky kind. If my work has taught me anything it's that

there is always a hero, and there is always a villain. I think anyone making

themselves an army of giant monsters is going to be a villain.

DR SMITH: This isn't a film. In real life, things are not so clearly defined

as right and wrong, good and evil. Life is complex, messy and there isn't

some handy exposition to tie up all the loose ends.

GENERAL: Look, I believe the guy who isn't dressed like a circus clown.

Trivia:

Fanik was inspired to travel to the bayou after reports of UFO sightings in

the area.

The locusts that swarm the town are based on the Rocky Mountain locusts.

As Dr Smith reveals later, this species became extinct in the 19th

century.

The military co-operated with the director, providing the use of army

personnel and equipment. It has been speculated this was done to make

up for the destruction of the town of Hammerston, in a training exercise

that claimed the lives of several soldiers.

Sheena Sown retired from acting after this film. She became an animal

expert, writing several books on endangered species. Following

her death in 1985, a conservation charity was set up in her name.

Mistakes:

No British police boxes were ever located in Louisiana, so there is no reason

why one would be clearly shown next to the inn in which Spire and Malone

spend the night.

Insider Dealing

Dann Chinn

An adventure of the Fourth Doctor, with Romana

The sound of shifting bricks - loud, impertinent - makes you open your

eyes again. You marvel, briefly, at *the* jolt you feel. There's a sudden sense

of pulling in from a wider space; of stunted limbs prickling, uncurling

from numbness. Somewhere in the middle of your mind, a fluttering

image of waterweed and bird-chatter, and a tyre swinging on a rope cradle.

Just once. Then it's gone.

The cellar is a lolling gloom: a jumble of jutting shadows and debris. In

the shafts of light from the broken ceiling, dust sifts in weary whirls. Here

and there, brighter colours - baby blue, glimmers of pale looping cords,

frayed cardboard. A wink of light from the edge of a battered tin. Burst

packaging sprawled across the floor. Fragments of cornflakes crushed and

sprayed from beneath smashed masonry; gnawed clumps of wood held

together by warped old nails. A single yellow rubber glove, split and turned

half-inside out. You blink dumbly at it, as if it's your own hand, battered

and useless at the end of an arm you can no longer feel.

'Ah - you're back with us.'

That voice is big and smooth, filling your little world. Your gaze jerks

towards it. Suddenly, you have a face again - you can feel *the* muscles

pulling in a flash of white pain, like surfacing into scalding cold air.

Panicking, you spasm wildly after fingers and toes as your numbed and

unseen limbs swell in a thrilling discord. You hear a shriek - glassy and

shrill - as dry air gushes past your lips. Far off, there's a rumbling crash

and a confusion of high, distant cries. The dust in the air jumps.

'Oh no - I really wouldn't do that.'

This time the voice is a close, velvety boom - a lush flick at the ear,

drawing you back in again. Sore and confused, you stare at the face a few

arm's-reaches away.

The tall man has wedged himself into a recess in the cellar wall. He sits

with his arms wrapped around his bony knees and his big, elegantly booted

feet wedged against a pile of bricks. A long, old-man's coat, the colour of

ancient wine and blood, rucks up around his body. Between the knees

and the shadow of a wide-brimmed hat, a broad, calm face regards you

with the oddest, most unblinking expression you've ever seen - concern,

distance and immobility gathered together into a still half-smile.

'It's Jonathan, isn't it?' he says. 'Well, of course it is. Even under all those

neurocilia and with the gates still half-open, you're Jonathan. It

wouldn't

have worked, otherwise... '

His wide compelling eyes become distracted, releasing their grip on

you. His long-fingered hand drifts up to his temple, where a black bulge

of headphone rounds out from beneath a mass of dark curls. From the

headphones, his fingers trail down a black cord to where a boxy grey

object rests on the wreckage, next to a pooling swatch of burgundy wool.

Squinting, you see that *the* burgundy is simply the end of a trailing scarf,

long enough to make a lasso. As for the object, you can't quite make it out.

A toolbox? A trumpet? There's something very strange yet familiar about

its lines, and in your daze you can't quite place what it is.

The man would look odd for an adult at the best of times. Are those

really question marks on his collar, or are you just not seeing straight? But

it's not just the funny clothes. Sprawled there, in his lair of brickwork, he

dimly reminds you of how your friends look on those afternoons when you

bunk off school. Afternoons of a rich and lazy excitement, when you head

into the woods to find yourself a nest in the undergrowth to play cards

and wind each other up. Or where you can suck on aniseed balls and make

plans about the rest of your lives. All of those things you'll do once

you're

old enough, or big enough, to wangle them away from the bigger lads and

the grown-ups. All the wild, wicked and exciting things that are just blips

on the horizon now, or rough shapes waiting in the future. A memory

of aniseed flavour floods onto your dry tongue. The man's mouth works

thoughtfully for a second as he gazes back at you. Then it slacks, abruptly,

into a wide doggy grin - tooth-filled and friendly.

'I'm the Doctor, by the way. Or did you know that already? Since I've

been tinkering around inside your head for the past few hours, perhaps

we don't need the introductions.' The grin widens, if that were possible.

'Hello, all *the* same.'

What's he on about? Fearful, you flinch away from the rushing speech,

the eager gaze, and that strange, disturbing intimacy - and your world

inflates around you. The cellar shrinks away, a tumbling photo. Your

awareness rises, like sap, up hundreds of rustling paths...

... and suddenly you're somewhere else. Somewhere else you know very

well. Joy flares, abrupt and wonderful.

The cellar has gone. Instead, you're racing through the woods on a bike,

through a welter of spring leaves. In between the tree-trunks, you see your

house, getting smaller and further away as you weave deeper in along

the paths, your tyres spitting aside little slivers of twig and pebble. Then

there's a blink; and it's changed, as if everything had slipped sideways

for a moment The same woods, but now you're running, stumbling, still

happy. You feel your knees scuffing on sand; see the white-painted wall of

another house, hurtling past Your out-flung arm swats at another boy's

ducking head - you make sure that you miss him, this time, and both of

you yell with laughter.

More voices and faces - you recognise them. There's Max, and Dylan;

there's Chris, throwing a tennis ball; there's that plonker David Maclnnes,

whom you let hang around sometimes cos his big sister's nice and he's

got stories about her. Now you're wrestling cheerfully with Chris over a

conker, a chorus of excited voices cheering you on. You recognise that

battle. It happened last year. September, maybe? For a second, it turned

serious. A real scuffle - stares and grunts and bruising grips - until you'd

tripped over each other's feet and vanished into the tall bracken, giggling

helplessly. Later on, you'd shared a Mars bar as if nothing had happened.

Cocooned in the rush of tumbling memories, you lie happy. Each flicks

past in an instant, as bright and as vivid as when it first happened.

You

forget the numbness and the dark, battered cellar. You forget about the

strange man and his odd manner. You just revel in the flow of images and

the feeling of home.

The pictures and sounds keep coming in bright, vivid blinks and

splashes, like a stone skipping across water. You hear cheerful shouts of

boys; you see a branch, swinging. You grab the apple that your Mum's left

on *the* counter, and you race out of the back door. You swing the gate and

vault over it at the same time, loving *the* way that you know just how hard

to push and to jump, and how to fall into just the right place. In the woods,

you swat at a ball with a fallen branch, miss, and smash a big drowsing

beetle off a log - it's gone in an instant, leaving a tiny vivid smear, to roars

of delighted disgust from your mates.

Now you're running through the bendy little streets round the backs of

those new houses up the bank, giggling at the angry shouts of the bigger

lads chasing you as they get lost in the warren. They should've known

better before trying it on - there's no way that you're going to get stuck

somewhere you can't get out of.

Then you're up on the hill, looking down to where the road curls

through the town. Giddy happiness under the heart as you trace the

pattern. You know where everything is, and how it works. Where you can

run, and where things can be found...

'Ye-e-es,' the big voice sighs, sadly.

It all stops. The sensations of running and laughing whisper away,

and the pictures are gone, shivering off into blankness. Those heavy

velvety tones pull you down: back into the darkness of the cellar again,

with the man staring broodingly at you over the bulwark of his knees.

Feeling cheated, you try to glare back, but come up against the unexpected

compassion in those unblinking eyes. Something in you subsides. There's

a rustling, like a wire fence settling down again after a gust of breeze.

With a sigh, the man - the Doctor - seems to shrink, eyes shifting under

the ridiculous, dipping hat. From almost filling the cellar, suddenly he

looks lost A man ready to settle up, realising he's not got his wallet.

'You know, ordinarily I'd have asked Romana to come down and talk

to you instead, but she says I'm good with children. It'd be a meeting of

minds, she says.' An exaggerated, horsey roll of the eyes. 'And she says I

need more practice. I really don't know what she means. I mean, when do I

deal with children? It's not as if I'm in the habit of ferrying crowds of

them

around with me from place to place. Bickering and spoiling the fishing.

Whistling at the oysters and irritating them.'

A comical, contemptuous snort. Then the eyes are on you again, dog-

like: as if waiting to be thrown a stick, or a laugh.

In spite of the words, and the snort - in spite of this man's strange,

mercurial pushiness - you do laugh. There's something about him that

makes you trust him. Your laugh is a high tumbling sound, warm in the

dusty air: it sounds like someone else.

You're rewarded with a beaming smile - a thousand-watter of teeth and

appreciation gleaming through the shadows. Then with a sudden flick, the

smile congeals and he's sombre again, listening to the distance.

'Romana's upstairs, with your mother,' he announces. Too casually.

He rubs distractedly at his jaw. 'Well, when I say "upstairs", there's not

actually much upstairs left any more. Not after you finished with it. To

be honest, the whole neighbourhood looks pretty shaken. You could up-

periscope again and take a look, but I really don't think you'd enjoy it.' He

looks regretful. This was a rather lovely village, wasn't it? I think I drove

through it once or twice, back in my UNIT days. I'll show you.'

There's another of those peculiar blinks of vision. You see a man

sitting

bolt upright in an old-fashioned yellow car. He's speeding along the valley

road past your house, travelling ridiculously fast, like something out of

the Keystone Cops. He has a craggy profile, like a Roman emperor on a

coin, and a shock of white curly hair. He turns to you and winks. Just for a

moment, that imperious face morphs into the Doctor's goofy goggle-eyed

grin, then back again. It doesn't quite make sense, but you realise that

they're one and the same man - both of them younger, but at *the* same

time both older. The vision fades and the Doctor nods.

'A lifetime ago - and I should have been paying more attention to this

place back then... ' he murmurs.

Still dazed, you're puzzling over what that means, while you're also

savouring a peculiar rush of second-hand emotion: a strange fondness

for the man in the car mingled with friendly contempt, as if you'd been

invited to reach out and ruffle his hair or tweak the long, arrogant nose.

At the same time, there's a memory bobbing up which you can't quite

understand. A weird uncomfortable itch that makes you want to shuffle

your numb legs, a pang of something lost; and *the* hint of an unstoppable

urge to change...

Something in you responds faintly, like an engine turning over. Just

once. Then an unseen arm, as firm and gentle as a mother's, seems to

move in and steer you back towards the Doctor. A memory like old pain

etches his features for a moment. Then it's gone.

'It's funny how things change when you get older, isn't it?' muses the

Doctor. 'It can be difficult looking back at one's past, Jonathan. Even a

little painful, sometimes.' His smile is weightless, but his eyes are locked

dead straight at you as he talks.

You've no idea what he is talking about, but you're feeling that

something horrible is lurking behind the prattle. What did he say about

'upstairs? You inhale, painfully, and try to ask the question. A shapeless,

reedy croak.

The Doctor's gaze and nod speak silent understanding.

'You're very fond of your home, aren't you, Jonathan?' he says. 'Your

mother told us all about that, just before we found where you'd tucked

yourself away, and put two and two together. It all made sense then. You

were so proud of the town. People said that no one knew the ins and out

of the place better than you did. You were never bored - you'd spend every

spare hour that you could outside on the streets, in the woods. You knew

every shortcut, every house and tree. Everything you needed, and

more...'

He sighs, then gathers himself and settles more comfortably in his nest of clinking bricks, as if it were an armchair.

'I don't suppose you'd know what I meant if I started talking about empathic warfare and synergic infiltration, would you?' he enquires, almost chattily. The words rattle off his tongue like frozen peas. 'No, of course you wouldn't. I'm afraid that not even I know much about it, really. I've done as much as I can with instinct and guesswork. Plus a large helping of natural genius, and a few bits and pieces I happened to be carrying.' His eyes twinkle as he pats at his pockets, then taps *the* grey box on the floor, encouragingly. 'For instance, this used to be a sort of telephone for a race of squid-people out in Dorado. It adapted rather well once I'd worked out how to connect it to... '

He catches himself, and sighs again. 'Well, not that you'll really want to know all about that now... Maybe there's a better way to explain things to you.'

He ponders for a moment.

'Ah. That's it. Let's say there are a people known as the Vawm - I'm afraid their full name actually sounds like somebody squeezing a bottle of ketchup, but we'll call them the Vawm. It'll do. Let's say that they don't like other people very much, but that they're rather good at understanding

them... in a manner of speaking, anyway. Another thing you'll need to know is that they don't like fighting very much either. Too immediate. Too much engagement. But what the Vawm lack in fellow feeling, they make up for in being clever. They've found ways around their limitations.'

A frown.

'Tell me, Jonathan, do you know anything about martial arts? Judo?'

A long-ago memory surfaces. Echoing shouts in *the* school hall, and white-clad bodies slamming down onto mats. You still can't speak, but you're starting to get the hang of this. You push the memory towards the Doctor, hoping that he'll get it. Yes?

The Doctor seems to understand. He nods encouragingly.

'Yes, that's right. It's a different way of fighting. You don't have to be all that strong, you simply use your opponent's own weight and strength against them. If someone's rude enough to throw a punch at you, you just make sure that he can't stop throwing it. In fact, you give him a hand. You help him along by grabbing his wrist and pulling it further. He ends up flat on his back. Have you got that?'

It's your turn to nod. Beside your ears, there's a slithering jangle as something else nods too.

'Goo-o-od. Now, Jonathan - just imagine this. What if you could do the same thing using what somebody feels, instead of what they do?'

With a ripple of bricks the Doctor slides his feet apart, leaning forward

to rest his chin on his knees. His stare is intense and gentle.

'You see, this is what happens. In their travels, sometimes the Vawm find

a world that they want for themselves, or one that they fear. To be honest,

they don't seem to make much of a distinction between the two. So what

they'll do is... they'll drop a sort of seed there. A watchful little trapping

seed, looking for things to use. By itself, it can't do much. Different soil,

so to speak - the wrong roots. Left alone, it can drift for ages, far away

from where it was supposed to be. But if a Vawm seed finds the right mind

to slip into, it'll thrive...'

A pause. You try, in vain, to digest this. The Doctor's gaze goes distant.

'I've always wondered why the Vawm didn't go in for diplomacy,' he

muses, breaking the silence. 'After all, they've a real knack for getting

hold of inside information and then using it. They'd make marvellous

spies. Trouble is, although they can read other races like newspapers, they

really don't go in for talking to any of them. They absolutely hate it, in fact.

They'd make dreadfully gloomy next-door neighbours, assuming they'd

ever allow anyone to live next door in the first place.' He looks bleak.

'Which they won't, of course. No other race has such an unparalleled

opportunity for sympathy, but such scant capacity for feeling it.'

The eyes sweep back to you. Sadness, and momentary evasion, passes across his face. You glimpse just how old he really is. For a moment, he just looks at you. Then he gathers himself together.

'We haven't got much time left, Jonathan. I'm afraid that it's time you took that look upstairs.'

He touches the boxy grey object on the floor. His fingers tap restlessly along it, like a man reading Braille. You see concentration furrowing around his eyes, and then it's as if someone has reached into you and pulled a lever, opening you up and out. The fogginess you've been feeling rolls away and you feel millions of limbs reaching out of you as you rise - the cellar fading, daylight colours bleeding in from a hundred little windows - until you're hovering at the centre of a ballooning sphere of images.

This time the scream wrenches out of you - a tearing, leathery noise of loss.

In the oblivious summer sunlight, you see your home. The town lies smashed - swatted against the hillside and the swerving line of *the* valley, as if a giant's broom has crashed down through it. You're hanging in a kaleidoscope of wreckage. Houses and shops are gutted shells; trees twisted into furious splintered shapes. Enormous scars rake the earth. Here and there are ragged holes lined with shattered bricks. Random

metal, pale shards of wood and other huddled objects have been bundled

into them, carelessly and indiscriminately.

And it's at this point that you start to remember.

Something cold and calculating had been inside, with you. Stalking

through your memories; turning you over like a toy box, ticking off point

after point. It had piggybacked itself onto you, driving and full of intent.

It made you look at trees and walls and water that you'd known for years.

It made you see them in another way - full of tensions and clenches

and things waiting to happen. The abrupt, violent transformation of a

chemical; the vicious spring lurking inside a bough; the hidden hammer-

blow waiting to be found in a ceiling. It had held you there, helpless, while

it took careful, cruel notes about everything.

And then it had given its orders. It had made you burrow deep into those

things, to tap and turn those energies outwards. You remember burstings

and shrapnel. Boughs whipping like spears and water thrashed to steam.

The incredible thunder of cascading bricks, *the* screech of tortured wood

and the sky blotted out by dust. People panicking, running in terror down

back-alleys and forest paths - down paths you knew better than they did

- into traps ready to spring. Screams, suddenly cut off.

It had been like stamping on beetles. Except that each one had been a

person.

(... and, earlier, in the forest pool, you'd stood ankle-deep in the water,

wondering just what was happening. You'd trodden on something, which

burst under your bare feet. Your friends' excited voices had snapped off in

mid-sentence. Something invisible had hurtled up you like a shock; the

birdsong stopping dead...)

Horrified, you realise what *the* Doctor has been trying to tell you.

It seems like a long time until you hear his voice again. It's probably only

been a few seconds, but you've had to squeeze each and every one of them

past the huge lump in your throat and the roar in your ears.

They needed a way in, you see,' he's saying, softly. 'Someone who

understood the terrain. Show the Vawm anything that you understand

- anything - and they'll wrench that knowledge from you and use it to

hit someone with. All they need is for someone to point the finger and

they'll find ways of pulling the triggers. Weaknesses to exploit, strengths

to pervert. Structural stresses, useful chemistries... Anything that can be

bullied off its rocker. Very effective, but it's a particularly mean-spirited

way of making war.'

There's disgust in his tone that makes you cower, even in your grief...

and just as suddenly his voice softens again.

'None of this is your fault, Jonathan. Remember that. The Vawm were

the ones who did *the* breaking and entering. You're just *the* key they stole to help them do it.'

All this time, you've been hovering helplessly above the wreck of the

town, gazing down at the enormous twisted footprint you've laid across its

face. Now you feel some gentle movements in the machinery. The pictures

in front of your eyes shuffle. There are a few quick glimpses of shattered

back-alleys and caved-in roofs - then another darkened room, tumbled

and disordered, with vast cracks in the wall. Daylight shines through the

cracks, vaguely illuminating shapes on the floor.

The Doctor's voice, close at your ear.

'I think that you should see this too, Jonathan.'

Wrapped in blankets, battered coats and bedsheets, people are huddled

around the room. In the dimness, many are indistinguishable from the

objects around them - the battered remains of a sofa, a plastic bucket, a

heap of scorched cushions or tattered clothes. Some faces are turned away,

out of sight. Others are streaked with blood or dirt, or are staring into

nothingness. Dulled eyes occasionally blink. Bitten lips wobble. A young

woman, blonde and determined-looking, is moving carefully among

them with cups of water. She's impossible to miss - she's the only person

there who is clean - and she's got the same kind of vividness to her that

the Doctor has. Her face is set in an expression of helpless anger. But you

don't spare her too much time.

Painfully, you seek out or find certain faces, one by one. George from

over the road. People from school - Chris, Steve Licinio, Eric Jacobs, Miss

Viner, Penny Whelan. The lady who fills bags at the supermarket. Bob Li

from the Chinese takeaway - five years older than you but weeping like a

little kid. Your mother. Forehead grazed and hair full of dust, eyes sunken

and haggard. She's rocking gently, with her fingers locked around a

chipped mug of water. Alive.

You try not to think about all the faces you don't find.

At least some *of them* made it. At least some *of them* made it... Was that me, too?

Did *I pull* some of those punches? Did *I save them?*

You sense, rather than see, the Doctor nodding. Gradually the room full

of people fades and his face comes back into focus. The shadowed bricks

of *the* cellar return with it. You both wait until it settles.

'Some of these things will heal, you know,' he murmurs. 'Perhaps

they'll

explain it away as a tornado. Or an earthquake. Maybe even those people

hiding upstairs, who saw what happened and survived it... Even they might

come to believe that story, in time. It's remarkable what people can recover

from, if they have to. And if they can't bear the questions, or *the* true

explanation? Well... there's always another explanation they can find.'

He pauses for a moment. When he speaks again, he's sterner.

'But I'm afraid that there's one thing that won't heal. I'll have to let you

see it through my eyes... There...'

The Doctor vanishes. The cellar around you flicks round, a quick half-

turn, and snaps into sharper relief.

Through the punctured shadows, you see a sprawled figure slung

against a wall. A doll-like body, hooked at peculiar angles, its feet dirty

and bare. From almost every square inch of skin, pale, gently waving

fibres sprout like porcupine quills or shoots from a potato. Thousands of

them ripple across the floor, climbing the walls, vanishing into crannies

or thinning to vague mist. You recognise the shreds of clothes, and the

dulled eyes staring at you beneath the forest of fibres, filling with your

own horrified tears.

No, no, no, you weep with the broken boy on the cellar floor...

The Doctor's voice is a pair of huge soothing hands, cupping the

fluttering horror and grief.

We did as much as we could. We closed down most of the Vawm's

wormhole gates: we stunned the neurocilia and the effector tendrils.

Almost the only thing they can do now is show you the aftermath. But that

lull won't last. Only a few minutes ago, when we started talking, you got

jumpy and lashed out. And you heard what happened then. That was the

remains of next door coming down, I think... '

Now you're back in your own eyes, watching the Doctor. Asking what

you don't need to speak.

The Vawm will be back, Jonathan. Once they've got a hook in a particular

place, they'll not stop using it. So you have a choice. You can stay as you are

and let them use you as a hammer again, to smash everything they didn't

get this time. Or... we can try one last judo move.'

The Doctor leans in closer.

The Vawm technology has forced you into the world like a crowbar; and

I'm very sorry, but even I can't pull you out again. But there is something

that I can do. I've already broken into their program - and I can trip their

program codes past the tipping point. That might just send you all the

way over. No more twisting and breaking. You'll just disappear into those

things they were trying to make you break.

'I'm afraid that I don't really know what happens next. I did say that

synergic infiltration wasn't exactly my field of expertise, and even I find

that handling Vawm paraphysics is a bit like knitting with smoke. But I

can hazard a guess.'

You listen. It's all you can do, now.

This body will die here,' says the Doctor, sadly. There's nothing I can do

to stop that. There's been too much change. But I do think that something

of you might be going back into those trees and into that rubble. Some of

you is already in there, after all.'

He looks pensive, as if he's trying to convince himself.

'Hmm. It's a question of sympathies, really. The Vawm used what you

knew... and what you didn't know you knew... and what they discovered

that you could touch. You had a way in, and you still do. It might be a way

to be part of things again. Perhaps this time you can use those sympathies

to do something better. Perhaps there'll be something left of you which

can help - some way to give back a little of what's been ripped away.' His

voice tails off for a moment. 'Even splintered twigs can sometimes be

bound back onto the tree,' he murmurs, quietly, far away.

A flicker of hope passes across his broad, distant face. Then he's statue-

still as he locks gaze with you again. Gentle and remorseless.

'Of course, I could have made all of this happen already - if it was going

to happen. Or I could have just turned you off like a light, and not woken

you up. And I'm sorry you had to see all of this. But I think there's more

value in the choice - and, maybe, the change - if you make it yourself.'

He falls silent, and quietness fills the cellar. Strangely, it's not more pain

that rushes in to fill the gap, but a kind of calm. The worst has passed over

you now. You think, briefly, of your mother's drawn and weary face in the

darkness, and of the scattered ruins of the place where you grew up. Your

grief settles, a dying wind across the wreck of the valley.

And then a memory slips into view, as clear as the summer when it first

happened. You'd been running down a forest path and you'd not been

taking care: you'd tripped and gone flying. You'd crashed into the branches

of a sapling tree - still thin as a baby's fingers - and cracked them. They'd

been so pale inside: the green sheaths of bark torn and shredded, slumping

mournfully towards the ground. Your mates had laughed at the way you'd

tumbled, and it *had* been funny; but you remembered how bad you'd felt

seeing the tree there, drooping with hurt.

But you'd come back the same way a week later and stopped by the tree

- and you'd crouched there, fascinated, by the way that those branches

were coming back, the wounds vanishing beneath the new bark. It hadn't

been the same - the branches were a little crooked, and they'd never point

in quite the same way again - but you'd stayed there for a while, fascinated

by the tree's quiet determination to heal itself.

In stories, these decisions take page after agonising page. Here and

now, the decision is made like sliding a switch. Strong again, you stare in

agreement into *the* Doctor's dark pupils. You see his face soften around

his pale blue gaze - more human, now. Compassionate and approving.

You see, just for a moment, the terrible things he has to do to keep saving

people.

His mouth isn't moving now, but his dark, velvety voice has slipped deep

into your head - purposeful and alien, a ceaseless flowing baritone chant

of rising and falling sounds. They layer over each other, a strange and

purposeful choir, laying down instructions. Deep inside yourself, you feel

unseen things clicking and sliding like locks. Catches are releasing.

You

feel functions close down and fall aside, as if you're dropping a stick - one

which you don't remember holding. The sounds echo in your head, wider

and wider, until they reach a point where they merge into a steady golden

pulse of urgency and come racing back at you, like a tide line sweeping

back up along the length of a beach.

And now you're feeling like a twisted umbrella - the spokes springing

loose, black fabric whirling away on the wind. The whole cellar, the

Doctor's face, is spiralling away. The last you see of him are those wide,

acknowledging, unblinking eyes as the greenery comes for you. The paths,

the hillside and...

Not so far away, a battered tyre hangs on ropes from a branching beech

tree. A clearing in a wood; a small pond waiting, with green leaves

immersed in the water. Two forgotten shoes, boy-sized, scattered on the

muddy banks.

If anyone is there, perhaps they see the tyre swing gently. Just once.

Then nothing.

The Andrew Invasion

John Callaghan

An adventure of Andrew

I have never previously had reason to question the integrity of my stomach.

I'd always regarded it as a stoic friend, to be relied on but, perhaps to my

discredit, taken for granted. Like a truly good compatriot, however, when

the chips were down and duty called, it made its presence felt.

I'm getting ahead of myself, though. My name's Andrew. I live somewhere

anonymous in the Home Counties and play for the local cricket team most

Saturdays. Three weeks ago we performed particularly badly and I was in a

weary frame of mind as I trotted home. My flat is quite close to *the* sports

ground and so I was still wearing my cricket whites as I shambled though

the narrow and overgrown alley that leads past the neighbourhood's back

gardens to my back gate.

Now the story becomes a little peculiar, but bear with me. I could see

my shadow become clearer and clearer and I realised that there was a

bright blue light behind me. At the same time, I could hear a sound a bit

like a box of springs being dropped down a staircase. I was stunned for a

few seconds and then slowly turned around to face whatever was behind

me...

At the sight of it, my brain did a cartwheel. Standing amid the familiar

unloved shrubbery and discarded crisp packets was a creature so horrific I

felt the moisture drain from my mouth and eyes. It looked like something

from an undersea wildlife documentary by Francis Bacon. Mucus-covered,

ropy brown veins pulsed under a scaly man-shaped orange exoskeleton.

Two malevolent red eyes smouldered above a fanged maw, which slathered

as it spoke.

'At last, Doctor!' Its voice was like someone burping through treacle.

'You can evade us no longer! After your sabotage consumed our fleet at

Zorxon Five, our scientists devoted themselves to tracking you down. And

now we have you in our power!'

The abomination had stopped talking, and gradually it dawned on me

that it was waiting for a response. My jaw was too slack and my tongue too

paralysed to form more than a terrified croak.

Bizarrely, this seemed to put the creature off somewhat.

'Er...' it continued. 'Anyway, now we will reap our vengeance! Die! Die!'

And with arms extended and veiny claws flexing, it lunged at me!

Now, I'm not proud of what I did next. But on reflection I feel it was the

only course of action left open to me and is what any sane person would

have done in *the* same situation.

I was sick.

The claws halted only a few centimetres from my face. The malignant

eyes slowly looked downwards. Then the evil thing recoiled.

'No!' Gurgling its anger, it backed away. To my astonishment, thick

white smoke was coiling from where the creature's feet met my... well,

dinner. 'Hydroxonium! You have exploited our one weakness, Doctor!' A

look of vicious resolve angled its stony features as it frantically waved an

oily talon at me. 'But this will not stop - ow! - us! I shall return to avenge

my warriors' defeat! Ow!'

And after a roar and a blue flash, I was suddenly alone, still transfixed,

with my fear pooling in my stomach.

Over the next few hours, the cosy world I had grown up in wrapped around

me like a hug. Unlikely as it sounds, I went to bed convincing myself that

my subconscious had concocted the whole event as a distraction from

my appalling cricketing performance. I am prepared to concede that this

explanation was somewhat unlikely. But what if it had been real? What

should I have done? The fact the horror was addressing me in an official

capacity - and using my title 'doctor' would imply that - means I could

have theoretically passed it on to my supervisor. But then, 'At last we have

you in our power, Andy!' sounds somewhat too informal. These delirious

thoughts made me even more convinced that the nightmarish encounter

had actually been a delusion, so I forced myself to forget. Lucky for me that

my job -i work at a nuclear power plant, by the way - provided constant

distractions that week and I was also preparing to be an usher at my friend

Clive's wedding on the Saturday.

The ceremony was cheerful, colourful and loud. At the reception,

although the DJ was barmy and the bride and groom's first dance was to

'Bizarre Love Triangle', the grape was flowing and everyone was in high

spirits. As the evening wore on, however, I felt somehow unsettled. The

laughter around me seemed almost mocking and I became more acutely

isolated in my disquiet. Eventually, I excused myself and started the walk

home, now overdressed in my smart usher's clothes of green velvet jacket,

high-collared shirt and golden cravat. The fresh night air cleared my head

a little and I took out my mobile (it was spoiling the line of the jacket,

anyway) to leave a message letting the happy couple know I was okay.

Then, at the end of my road...

A green flash, this time, with a sound like a banjo being thrown into a

cement mixer. And there was my second visitation: a seven-foot-tall robot!

The sodium street lights made unearthly reflections on its chrome finish.

As it powered towards me, its metal feet left cracks in the paving slabs. Its

titanic bulk was crowned by a lozenge-shaped head with a thin green beam

across it, which oscillated as it spoke.

'I am Vengeance Unitor Nine!' it barked. 'You have been recognised

as the being known as Dok-tor! You are guilty of war crimes against the

Unitor Space Navy Squadron! Your weak spongy flesh will blacken and

perish under my Unitor Death Beam!'

Now, no way was I going to be sick this time. It was a hired suit. It was

apparent, though, that this visitation was no delusion. Or if it was, at least

this time it had the courtesy to introduce itself before talking nonsense,

and, I might add, going into unnecessary detail about it too.

My guts grew cold as I saw the shining colossus raise its arms. With

a crack, a vivid spark flew between them. In a panic, I scrabbled at my

phone, attempting to dial 999. Which of the emergency services I thought

might help me I don't know. If I had got through I'd have probably ended

up asking for the coastguard.

Tray to your weak spongy gods, mortal! Sentence of death is to be

carried out in ten... nine... eight...'

I could hear the buzz of the weapon charging up. Desperately, I stabbed

at my phone with numb fingers, only succeeding in starting up an

annoying speeded-up ringtone that I hadn't been able to delete.

'Grrr-ggrrrrr-grrr-ha-ha-ha!' went the tinny speaker and it occurred to

me that it was a dreadful elegy to be playing at my death.

The robot seemed to react with similar distaste. The green line changed

to a violet and then red pulsing glow. 'Aaaargh!' it screeched. 'Forbidden

frequency accessed! Cerebral circuits disrupted!' It clutched its head. 'You

have not heard the last of me, Dok-tor! Aargh! Destruct code activated!'

And with a whine and a yellow flash, and a gust of wind as the air rushed

in from behind me, I was left on my street alone, looking at two dustbin-

lid-sized craters where the automaton had stood.

The next time, I thought, I'll be ready. I admit I may have seemed a bit

odd to others but whatever lengths I went to, I now knew I wasn't potty.

I bought some empty fire extinguishers and a megaphone - the miracle

of the internet! - and called in sick to work. They seemed quite ready to

believe that I was sick when I told them my story, as it happens.

I discovered how to repressurise the extinguishers (I'll spare you) with

their new contents. Then I spent the rest of my time focusing my mind on

how to conquer my fear response. I rehearsed what had happened over

and over, preparing my reactions. This time I'd do more than croak and

fumble. This time I'd go down with some dignity!

For a week, all I saw were my four walls and my props. I took comfort

in my cheery red and yellow patchwork quilt and my brightly-coloured

pyjamas with their childish tartan cat design. Had you looked in through

the ground-floor window, you would have seen me readying my portable

CD player, clicking my megaphone button on and off and staring almost

without blinking at the street outside.

Then, at 6.05 pm on Saturday - today - I heard the sound that sent a week's

worth of stored-up adrenaline gushing through my system. A springy

banjo in a cement mixer being thrown down a staircase! I remember

seeing my shadow outlined on the wall by the lilac light that came from

the front garden.

With a calmness that invigorated me, trembling not with fear but anticipation, I wrapped myself in my duvet and took my trolley of equipment out to the porch. I looked at the lawn and there stood...

... an orange offal monstrosity and a giant humanoid machine, evilly glistening and glinting (respectively). They were positioned on the footpath next to the garden that I must have walked down almost every

day of my life.

'Doctor!' said the veiny beast. 'Our worlds are rebuilt! We have -

'We have combined our forces to reconstruct our devastated homeworlds!' barked the robot. 'Together-'

The slimy scarecrow cut in: 'Together we have forged a peaceful compromise and the war -'

The robot continued, its voice slightly amplified this time: 'The war is at

an end. There is only one mutual condition of the truce to be met.'

There was a short pause. After a glance at its comrade, bearing an inscrutable, somehow alien expression, the gloopy monster turned to me and continued. 'We are united by our hatred of one being - who has

foiled us for the final time. We have the honour of being charged with his

execution.'

He leered at me and thick grey saliva dripped from his jagged teeth.

'That being is -'

You will be eliminated!' grated the robot. It was met by another

indecipherable look from its fellow executioner. Then both beings raised

their arms. I could hear *the* power building up in the electronic banks of

one would-be assassin and see the vile glee in the face of the other.

Now was my moment to act! I started the portable stereo playing and

knocked the pin from the first of my extinguishers. As the accelerated

cackling loony ranting ringtone burst from the loudspeakers at almost ear-

shattering volume, I slammed my hand on to the button of the cannister I

held, spraying home-made bile in a wide jet over the menacing figures!

The sense of release and liberation was unreal. It was as if someone

had taken my pin out. I roared and laughed and watched them panic and

bleep. Steam poured from the joints of the machine, its arms arcing lethal

electricity at random. Smoke and froth boiled from the skin of my organic

assailant as it squealed wetly. I was shouting and laughing and felt like I

was aflame with energy.

'Begone!' I yelled over and over through the megaphone. I don't know

if it was my screaming or my laughter that made my lungs and throat raw

as I picked up another container and sprayed its saving fluid at the flailing

shapes. 'Avaunt!' I hollered. Actually, that's not exactly what I shouted: I

used somewhat stronger terms. And as loud as I could, as loud as I have

ever been in my life, to be heard over the burbling of the ringtone on the

stereo and *the* final screams of the fleeing opponents.

'Aargh! Retreat!'

'Evacuate!'

Boom! The wind carried me forward as, with a puce glare and a

thunderclap, they were gone. But I couldn't stop. I had never felt such

freedom and joy!

That's it! Go back to Hell!' my voice boomed from the megaphone as I

fired a final hose of vomit from the last container.

Which is probably when my neighbours called you, officer.

Stolen Days

Arnold T Blumberg

An adventure of the Seventh Doctor

'I don't remember,' Alex said as he pulled into the driveway. Alison was

talking about some trip they took years ago. Not long ago at all, really,

but he already knew he wouldn't remember. It was happening again. It

was always the same.

'You know, that time we went walking on the boardwalk, *the* sun

was going down,' Alison said. She was rummaging in her purse for no

apparent reason. 'We just had dinner at that little coffee house and we

were walking back to the room. We just stood there and watched the sky

get dark. It was beautiful.'

Alison looked up, sighing with a smile, but Alex knew that wouldn't

last. He shrugged and set the brake.

'Sure.' He unhooked his seat belt, but Alison was looking at him. Her

smile was fading.

'You're just saying that. You don't remember!'

Alex sighed.

'No, I don't remember. I'm sorry.'

'How can you not remember? It was one of the most beautiful nights

we've ever had!'

'I just don't remember!'

Alison spent *the* rest of the night sulking and watching television while

Alex went up to bed. He lay in the dark, trying to conjure any images from

that trip. They didn't come.

This wasn't the first time. Alex couldn't remember some things very

well, or at all. And it seemed to be getting worse. Alison was always asking

him, 'Remember? Remember that place? Remember that day? Remember

how beautiful it was? Remember how happy we were?'

And Alex couldn't. Maybe something horrible was wrong. Memory

loss, dizziness... a tumour! That was it, a tumour, and it was growing! But

his doctor never found anything, however many tests they tried. He just

couldn't remember, that's all. Everything just faded away. The days were

just... gone.

Sometimes memories come back when you get older, Alex remembered

- ha! - reading somewhere. But until then, it was like all the best days

of his life were just shadows, black holes, lost somewhere in his mind,

forgotten. And he wanted to remember so much.

He drifted off to sleep. He didn't dream.

It had been a good day. A sunny weekend day, perfect for a road trip,

some shopping. A great day for just being. Alex and Alison spent the day

shopping, eating, laughing. She looked at him all day in that certain

way.

It was the same look she had on the day they were married, and when they

first met., no wait That was gone. But it was probably like that

Before heading home, they stopped at an ice-cream stand and sat at

a bench, watching as the receding sun turned the sky pink and purple.

Alex touched Alison's face, brushing strands of hair from her eyes, and

she smiled. It was such a good day. But it had to end soon. He hoped he

would remember it

At home they dropped their shopping bags at the door, tired and ready

for bed. Alison ran upstairs in the dark, yelling something about lighting

candles in the bedroom. Alex smiled and gathered up the bags and

moved them near the sofa. Shadows shifted on the furniture, the walls.

Something felt wrong. Alex was suddenly scared. He turned around,

startled, gasping for breath.

The old man stood in the darkness just by the stairs, cloudy eyes still

bright enough to catch what little light there was in the room. He was

startled too and staggered back, barely able to stand. He was crumpled,

bent, wearing an overcoat and holding something in his hand that

blinked and flashed. He quickly pocketed whatever it was, but he kept his

hand in the pocket, still holding it, like it was some kind of weapon. His

hands and face were wrinkled and worn, his wispy hair white and tousled.

He looked so sad.

'You weren't supposed to see me,' he said.

'No kidding!' Alex replied, then looked upstairs. If this old man was crazy, better not to let Alison know something was wrong. Maybe he could get the lunatic out of the house before she even had to know he had broken in. Get the old man outside, call the police on his mobile, something. But he was near the stairs... Alison...

You really weren't,' the old man said. 'You never have before. I must be

getting careless.'

'Now you listen to me,' Alex seethed, moving towards the old man, hoping he could somehow get him away from the stairs. He lunged and

the intruder stumbled again, catching himself on the arm of the sofa.

Alison had put some music on upstairs, which was lucky. The way sound

carried in this house, she'd never hear any of this. 'You tell me what you're... what do you mean "before?" Who the hell are you?'

'You know who I am, Alex. Look into my eyes,' said the old man. Alex did, and Alex knew. After all, hadn't he looked into those eyes a thousand

times before, every morning when he brushed his teeth, washed his hands, took his pills?

They were his own.

'Oh.' Alex shivered and stepped back.

It's me. You. Whatever.' The old man waved his free hand- 'You know what I mean.'

'But...' Alex struggled to regain his composure. 'But why now? What happens tonight? You're here to warn me about something important?'

The old man chuckled, but it turned into a violent cough that subsided after a few minutes.

'No, I'm not here to warn you about anything. I really loved that science fiction stuff, didn't I? Anyway, I wasn't here for you at all. I was here for the day.'

'You mean... you can only be here for 24 hours? What did you want to see?'

'No, no! I'm not here for the *day*. I'm here for *the* day. To take it'

'Take it? What do you mean? How can you...' Alex stopped as the old man flashed *the* thing in his pocket, showing it to his younger self before pocketing it again.

'It's not that difficult with the right equipment I've been coming back into the past for a while now. Taking a day here, a day there. Removing them. Bringing them back with me. It has to be done. Trust me, you'll understand one day.' And at that the old man smiled a bit

Even though he was in shock, the younger Alex understood. At last - a reason why he couldn't remember! Alex was seized by a strange euphoria;

when did the universe ever actually give you an answer to one of life's

mysteries? But his elation quickly turned to rage.

'You have no right!' He moved toward the old man, who stepped back,

his pocketed hand tightening.

'I have every right!' the old man hissed. 'This is my life!'

'No, it's my life! You're... destroying it, dismantling it!'

The old man sighed.

'When you get to be me, you'll understand. There's so little time left, so

little time. Everything is fading. I don't want to leave yet'

Alex saw tears welling in the old man's eyes as his other self looked

briefly towards the glow coming from the bedroom upstairs.

'I'm dying,' *the* old man said. 'The time I have left can be measured in

days, not weeks, months or years. Days. I need as many of them as I can

get I came back to find them. Sunlit, happy ones filled with joy and love

and peace. They're the ones that work best I started... editing them out,

one at a time. And it worked.'

'You can't keep doing this! You're taking it all away from me!'

'I need them more than you!' the old man yelled. 'Don't you see? Death

keeps hacking away at my remaining days every time I add another one.

I'm laying them down like railroad tracks but the train keeps rolling

forward, no brakes, no way to stop it If I run out of track... '

Alex couldn't take any more and slumped into a chair. For a moment,

he looked at the intricate woven pattern on its cushions and tried to

remember where he had got it That was the time he and Alison went.. No.

Gone. He wasn't even angry any more, just tired.

'How much longer?' he finally said as the old **man** looked down at him.

'Aren't you going to run out of days to steal? And what happens to me?

Soon there'll be nothing left to remember, nothing left of me!'

The old man looked at Alex as if for the first time. He almost reached out

to touch his younger self but seemed to think better of it.

'You've taken it all away,' Alex said quietly, sinking deeper into the chair.

'I can't remember anything, not the first time I met Alison, not the trips we

took. You've taken them all. Just to keep going. What kind of future are you

leaving us if the past is erased? What point is there in living?'

'Living is all that matters,' the old man said. He stepped forward, and

Alex found he could think of no response. If it was him, *when* it was him,

he didn't want to die either.

'Living isn't everything,' said a voice, taking Alex and his older self by

surprise. 'Take it from someone who's lived more than a few lifetimes.'

The younger Alex thought he saw a spark of recognition, even fear, in

the eyes of his older self. From the shadows stepped a strange man in dark

clothes - jacket, waistcoat with watch, hat perched on wavy long hair, eyes

darker than coal. He was short but still managed to tower over the other

two men. He held an umbrella with a bizarre bright red handle in one

hand; his other hand was outstretched, palm up. He stared at the old man,

who shook his head and stepped back.

'No! No, Doctor, I won't! You can't make me!'

'Oh, I wouldn't say that,' the Doctor said quietly. 'I won't ask you again,

Alex. Give it back. Now.'

'Give *what* back?' the younger Alex asked. 'Who are you?'

'It was the Pelesharans that gave me the idea,' *the* old man said. 'They

had this amazing technology. They were travelling from planet to planet,

harvesting the timelines of entire civilisations to prolong their own. Then

one day, in your future, they invaded the Earth. And that's when I met the

Doctor.'

The younger Alex glanced at the stranger and back at the old man,

whose shoulders had slumped. Tears glistened on his cheeks.

'The Doctor?' said Alex.

'Yes,' the old man said. 'I was working... it doesn't matter. What matters

is that I helped the Doctor stop them. I helped save the Earth.'

The old man looked at the Doctor, who stared back.

'But you were greedy,' the Doctor said.

'I earned the right to be happy! I deserve those days! I *need* them!'

'Then tell me,' the Doctor said to the old man. 'What do you

remember?'

Alex looked at the Doctor and his face darkened. He looked up and around

the room, at his younger self, at the life he used to live, searching out

memories as if they were floating in *the* air. He tried to recall the day he

got his first job. The day he stayed home sick and his mother watched

one movie after another with him, cups of tea and cheese always ready.

His grandmother's smile. Walks with his grandfather, endless days of

happiness and joy that always kept him going when things got bad.

But he couldn't find them. They were all gone. The memories just...

weren't there.

'What... what have I...?' said the old man, stumbling forward.

Alex was distracted by a sound from the stairs. Alison was wearing her

satin black nightgown, the scent of her perfume preceding her into the

room. There was also the faint aroma of incense wafting down the stairs,

and Alex could still see the flicker of candlelight on the landing, just by the

door of their bedroom.

'Alex,' she said. 'Where have you been, I've been waiting... oh!' She

stopped in her tracks and stared at the other two men in the room as her

husband moved quickly to lead her back up the stairs.

'Babe, go back... '

'What's going on? Who... ' Of *the* two of them, she had always been the fighter. Alex could see the anger building inside her now, overcoming the fear. But the moment she caught the Doctor's gaze, she stepped back.

'That's a good question,' the Doctor said, and reached for her hand. Alison offered it, much to Alex's surprise, and the Doctor led her to the old man.

'Well?' said *the* Doctor. 'Who is this, Alex?'

The old man stared at her, his face a blank mask. The younger Alex crossed the room and grabbed his older self.

'Say her name! Say her name!'

'I...' the old man grasped for something to say, shaking his head, gasping at the pressure of Alex's grip. 'I don't know who she is.'

Alex released the old man and stepped back, wild-eyed. He looked at Alison and a wave of terror washed over him. He tried to remember the first time they'd met. Their first date. The wedding. The honeymoon. He couldn't. And it was his own fault. He crumbled to the floor, aware not of the Doctor and Alison watching him, but of *the* old, empty man.

When he looked up, they just stared at each other. The Doctor stood between them and helped Alex up. Alison watched silently, accusingly. She didn't need to understand to know that he'd done something wrong.

'I'm not giving you any more days,' Alex told the old man.

'And you can't force them from him,' added the Doctor. 'Not now that he knows to guard against you.'

The old man grimaced. Or maybe it was a smile.

'You knew, didn't you?' he asked the Doctor.

'Humans are very predictable,' said the Doctor. 'But this stops here

and now. Before you lose everything. Leave with me, and let him,' and he

glanced at *the* younger man, 'build some new memories.'

The Doctor pointed his umbrella at *the* door. The old man smiled

and shuffled towards it as the Doctor went over to Alison. Alex saw him

whisper something to her and place a hand on her forehead. He brought

her to Alex, who held her tightly. She was quiet, almost asleep.

'She'll be fine in a minute or two,' the Doctor said. But Alex was

curious.

'Can I... Doctor, can I... ask... myself something?'

The Doctor stared at the younger Alex for a long minute. But then he

nodded.

'Should I be afraid?' the young man asked his older self.

The old man looked back at him and smiled, warm like a blanket. He

raised a soft, wrinkled hand to Alex's face and at last caressed it gently.

'No. There's no reason to be afraid. There's lots of bad coming, but

there's lots of good too. It's all worth it, every day of it. Or I wouldn't have

come back to take them in the first place. I just wanted... a few more, you

know? And I got crazy for a minute. You know how you are,' the old man

chuckled and coughed. Alex smiled back.

'But there's no cheating this now. Thanks to the Doctor.'

'Not thanks to me,' the Doctor said pleasantly, opening the front door

and waiting for the old man to step out first. He glanced back at Alex

- the younger Alex. 'I knew you'd do the right thing... eventually.' And he

smiled.

The old man seemed even older now, pale and gaunt like a ghost. His

eyes shone from dark sockets as he looked at Alex one last time.

'You have so many days ahead. Fill them.' And then he and the Doctor

were gone.

Alison shook her head as if shedding the lingering wisps of a dream and

looked up into Alex's eyes as he held her.

'Alex, where have you been? I've been waiting...' she said and stopped as

she saw Alex's red eyes, felt his body shaking.

'Are you all right, honey? What's wrong?'

Alex wiped his eyes.

'Oh I'm fine. It's nothing.'

'I thought you were just going to put the stuff away and come upstairs.

I've been setting everything up.' She smiled at him, her eyes sparkling. 'I

was waiting for you.'

She stepped back, twirled around and posed.

'See? I'm wearing the one you like, the black one. We got it at that place

in California, remember?' She smiled again and laughed. She was happy.

'Remember?'

Alex hugged her again and began to *cry*. Through the tears, he saw

Alison in the store in California, smiling back at him over her shoulder as

she bought the gown. He saw her in the hotel room that night, all lace and

perfume and soft skin. He saw her face that next morning when they woke

up with the sun streaming in the hotel room window, her eyes fluttering

open and her face lighting up as he stroked her hair.

'I remember, babe,' Alex said, smiling and holding Alison tight. 'I

remember.'

Lares Domestici

Anna Bratton

An adventure of the Second Doctor

The little man had strong opinions on the existence of alien life forms, as well as the importance of cake. His visits were usually heralded by the appearance of one and the rapid depletion of stores of the other.

After the ninth or tenth visit, Vivian stopped locking the doors. The monsters and the Doctor got in anyway, and fumbling with *the* chain had nearly cost her dear. One of the creatures had spun itself out of *the* shadows of *the* hallway and wriggled at her, mottled brown skin glistening eerily in the early light.

'It's not their fault, really,' the Doctor insisted later, mouth full of chocolate torte. 'I really think they're just a bit single-minded. It's a defence mechanism, I'm afraid. When their heads are clearer, I expect they'll be better behaved.'

Just then, something had rattled ominously in the pipes and he'd dropped his fork, whipped some sort of metal cylinder from his coat and disappeared under the sink, tapping and muttering 'Oh, dear, oh dear,' to himself. She found herself wishing that this still alarmed her.

Vivian wasn't supposed to be here, but neither were they. As for the Doctor, that was anyone's guess.

'I'm trying to write a book, you know -' she told him, more wearily

than

cross.

The little man waved a hand irritably from somewhere under the sink.

'Well don't let me get in your way.'

Vivian had first seen them three days after *the* funeral. A bookcase had been

promised to someone or other and she'd pulled it away from the wall, only

to discover a writhing mass of what seemed to be giant flatworms. Hissing

like silk ribbons, they'd wriggled through the air and into the heating

grate. She'd followed the rustling through *the* vents, ended up in the cellar

with hundreds of beady eyes and rustling forms rippling agitatedly at her,

and had gone quietly back upstairs and bolted the door.

This explained the whispering, she remembered thinking.

The man from Pest Control had listened to her description and then

asked a series of impertinent questions about her medications interacting.

A day later there was a sound like the universe tearing itself apart, and

looking out the study windows she noticed a boxy blue shape lurking next

to *the* shed. Going downstairs she found him: black jacket, checkered

trousers, hangdog expression counter-intuitively bright as he served up

the bundt cake left over from the reception. Two plates were on the table.

'They've sent me to take care of your, ah, extra occupants,' he'd said, and

smiled. Trusting that smile had probably been a mistake. 'I was trying to

find a home for them, you see, but they'd fallen into the vortex slipstream.

I seem to have shown up a few days late. Still!' He clasped his hands,

beaming. They seem to have done very nicely for themsel-'

'Wait, so it's your fault they're here?' she snapped.

'Ah,' he hemmed. 'Well, yes, I suppose you might say that...' There was

something about his crestfallen expression that wouldn't allow Vivian to

stay angry with him.

'What are they, anyway?' she asked, more kindly. 'Some sort of

mutation?'

'Oh, heavens no; just aliens. But I'll deal with them, don't you worry.'

Fourteen discarded drafts, nine crying jags, six sightings and three terse

emails from her editor later, Vivian was trying to remember why she'd

bothered to come back at all. She'd told herself the writing would go faster

once she'd cleared things out a bit, but between the ribbon creatures - or

'Larians', whatever the hell that meant - and the interloper with his weird

little whirring device, nothing much was getting done.

'Sorry, who's sent you, again?'

'Oh,' he'd say, and somehow never get around to telling her. He had a

knack for circuitousness that her grandfather would have loved.

'So when's it gonna be fixed?'

He blinked like a small, affronted owl. '"Fixed"?'

'Fixed. No more voices. No more... whatever those things are. I just want

this house back.'

'Hmm,' was all he would say.

Plot Points 4 and 7 ended up contradicting each other despite Vivian's best

efforts to untangle them, and she was starting to hate her protagonist The

Doctor had gone through most of the sponge cake and they were running

low on tea. The monsters - or whatever - stopped whispering every time

she'd started talking aloud in order to find the cadences of her characters'

speech. That really bothered her, but the silence in the rooms was worse

than the susurration in the vents or the occasional fits of recorder music

echoing from the pantry.

Time had warped the glass of the study windows into falling waves.

Glass was a liquid, her grandfather had explained, just thick and gloopy

like syrup. It might take hundreds of years to see any difference, but

everyone's windows were melting. Vivian remembered how her father

would sit at this desk for hours, tracing the bulges with an idle finger and

staring at the overgrown tangle of lilacs and strangler vines clustering outside.

She looked up suddenly. That blue box was back in the yard, again.

Something shivered on the surface of the glass and she whipped around to see one of the... things floating behind her, its expression as flat as the rest of its noodly body as it undulated in eerie silence. She yanked her laptop's extension cord from the wall and swung it in the creature's direction. Without showing any obvious fear or disquiet, it shivered away from her.

A moment or two later the Doctor was in the room, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. 'Getting on better with them, are we?'

'I want them out,' Vivian seethed. 'Now.'

'Working on it, working on it,' he soothed. 'Time for a break?'

Vivian glowered at him as he fumbled with the good china. 'I don't want you here either, you know. This is my house, not an intergalactic bus station.'

He made a vague head motion; passed her a cup. 'You grew up here.' It wasn't a question.

'This house has always been in *the* family.'

'And now?'

'No family any more.'

'Oh.' He put his fork down sadly. 'Orphaned, so to speak... '

Vivian snorted, leaning back against the sink. 'It wasn't some big

explosion or anything dramatic; I was just the youngest, by some way. The

new kid in a gaggle of older brothers and sisters, most of them dead by the

time I'd grown up.' She traced the rim of her mug with a finger, wondering

idly why she was telling him this. 'Old things everywhere. Even now.'

The Doctor's beetle brows furrowed as though in offence. 'Hmmph.

Well, one gets used to it Your house-guests are also fond of older

structures, so it might take some time before I've, er, coaxed them out I'm

sure you'll adjust' He took a swig of his tea and beamed.

Things had started turning up. Old keys, pennies, a barrette she'd lost

down the vents when she was five, a cufflink of her father's. Some sort of

tribute, maybe. Vivian rarely saw *the* creatures at the moment, and they

wiggled rapidly out of sight when she did.

She'd begun leaving cake on *the* table out of habit As quietly as he came

in, as whispery as the ribbon creatures were, at least they were genuine

sounds. It was better than straining her ears for the cadences and treads

of people that weren't there any more, aware of scents and sights whose

originators were long since gone. Bad company was still company at

least

Even so, it all kept her from writing. And then she'd found her

grandfather's old stamp album mixed in with her mother's things, and

that day had been just lost Worse, a small, raggedy character with a bowl

haircut had cropped up in the fifteenth draft, which seemed to be holding

despite the plot having stalled because she didn't dare think out loud any

more. It was almost easier to strain her ears for the hissing in the vents.

One late morning she awoke to a very loud sort of silence. She lay there,

listening to the no-sound, shambling downstairs only after it became

unbearable. The Doctor was asleep in her grandfather's overstuffed

armchair, head slumped forward, hands crossed, tea going cold at his

side. The creatures pulsed in the sunlit air: rustling shoals of parlour fish,

dusty hides faintly iridescent now by light of day. They quietly turned as

one to regard her.

She regarded them back.

She should have been angry, terrified, something. But all she could think

was that she should put the kettle on, so she did.

They're refugees. The last of their kind, as far as they know.'

'How do you know that?'

'They told me.' His shoes - currently the only visible part of him - shifted

uneasily as the compartment slipped a little. 'Oh, dear. You should really

clean this out -'

'They talk?'

'Oh yes. They've even been known to sing.'

'So why don't they talk to me?'

She could tell by the way his feet twitched closer together that the rest of

him had shrugged. 'Apart from being a bit disorientated from their stint

in the vortex? Shyness, I expect.' The Doctor's voice echoed from inside

the dumb waiter, pieces of fairy cake by his heels. 'Hmm. They're refusing

to unspool; I think they've even sunk their moor-roots into *the* insulation.

Incidentally - and it's not my place to speculate - what did you say to make

them so worried?'

'I didn't say -' Vivian began. 'What do you mean, worried?'

'Larians live in colonies, so naturally they're a bit concerned that you're

just puttering around on your own.'

Vivian's jaw clenched. 'I'm fine.'

'I didn't mean to suggest that you weren't. Sometimes you're just alone.'

The compartment rattled slightly. 'Lots of reasonably capable sorts can

handle being by themselves.'

'Like you?'

There was a momentary stillness from inside the shaft. 'It's a very hard thing to go through life alone,' he said at length. 'Remembering, but knowing that you aren't remembered.'

She wasn't sure where that had come from. 'But you just said it was all right to be alone.'

'Yes, I suppose I did.' The Doctor's feet shifted. 'Nothing wrong with it, but not easy.'

Vivian couldn't shake *the* feeling that, she was skirting the edges of something deeper and darker than the problem at hand. 'Well, fine, but I don't really want a house that sounds like it's full of ghosts -'

'Oh, all homes are full of ghosts, really. At least this one is properly alive.' There was that whirring sound and flakes of plaster drifted down his frock coat and checked trousers. 'What's so bad about a house that listens to you, anyway?'

After the fifteenth draft joined all the others on the scrap-heap, after the Doctor had been and gone yet again, Vivian sat for a long hour on the staircase, watching the streetlights filtering in dimly through the stained-glass window of the landing, highlighting the forms of orioles and roses.

Vaguely, she remembered giving them names when she was younger. (The stub of the silver pencil she'd worn down writing her first stories had resurfaced like an old memory, sitting on the desk. A faint trail of

dust

led to the floor vent.)

There was an expectant silence in the dark of the house.

She started telling it about being five and *the* way the lights reflected

against *the* bay windows when the tree was all set up and lit; about

sneaking down every morning in December just in case Santa had come

early. About Grandpa Hugh's boating stories and how every Sunday they

had had stew.

(Later in *the* night, the whispers told her about bright violet skies and

the laughter of someone whose name was unpronounceable, and of a little

man in a blue box and of war.)

She told it how *the* mapping of wrinkles moved across her mother's

hands kneading dough, and the way her father's study always smelled like

linen and juniper, and of the geraniums that languished indoors through

the long winter.

(The whispers told her of gardens burned to cinders, and of songs they

were terrified of forgetting, and of the lost.)

The silence that returned was a little too full, so Vivian set to work on

Draft 16.

'You could just leave them here,' she'd blurted after finding him under the

sink, tapping *the* pipes.

'I am leaving them here. Just making an adjustment or two -' The Doctor

beamed. 'There! I've jinxed the signal; wouldn't want anyone coming to

bother them. Or you, for that matter.'

'So that's it?' she'd said, and then, after his previous statement had sunk

in. 'What do you mean, "leaving them here"?'

'Well, do you want me to take them away?'

'No!'

'Lovely. They want to stay.' He beamed again. 'I wouldn't use the disposal

too much. Machine noise bothers them. And don't block the vents, and

make sure you show them how to work the thermostat before winter.'

Vivian watched him tuck his handkerchief into his breast pocket and felt

an odd twinge of loss. 'What about you?'

'Oh, I know how to work the thermostat -'

'No, I meant where are you going?'

The rest of her writing career would be spent trying to describe that sad,

sweet little smile. 'Home and away, my dear; home and away.'

Draft 16 held nicely, though the whispers occasionally took issue with her

pacing and the implementation of plot points. Now and then something

would move on the periphery of sight and there would be a hairpin or a

paperclip or one of her grandmother's antique buttons waiting for her.

Sometimes there was singing.

She never saw the Doctor again, but she always kept something around

the kitchen. Just in case.

Competition rules

The following competition rules *and writing advice were* posted on the Big Finish website on Monday, 11 December 2006.

Write for Doctor Who!

Big Finish is offering new writers the chance to have their work published in

one of our 2007 volumes of Doctor Who: Short Trips short-story anthologies.

The competition is open to anyone, of any age, who has never had a work

of fiction published that they've been paid for. All entries must be received

by 31 January 2007.

Since 2002, Big Finish has published numerous anthologies of short

stories featuring the first eight Doctors. The Short Trips range has included

writers who've written for the Doctor Who television series, the authors of

Doctor Who and science fiction novels and a number of first-time authors.

Big Finish has just announced their Short Trips tides for 2007 and beyond

- and your story could be in one of the collections!

Your story should start from the premise: How the Doctor changed my life...

What's it like to meet the Doctor, to be caught up in one of his adventures?

Perhaps your story is about someone who gets a trip in the TARDIS?

Maybe it's about a bystander who watches events from afar? Whatever

you

choose, things are never the same once the Doctor is involved...

Your story should be no more than 2,500 words in length. You can make

use of any of the first eight Doctors. You can also use any of the "classic"

television companions (up to and including Ace) and any of the Big Finish

companions (Erimem, Evelyn, Hex, Charley and C'rizz... but not Lucie,

please).

You cannot use either the Ninth or Tenth Doctors, nor their companions,

nor any other of the Doctor's past friends and enemies. No Daleks, no

Cybermen, no Time Lords, no Drashigs or Slitheen. Your story should be

wholly original.

Send your story in the body of an email (no attachments please), with

the tide in the subject line, to who.writers(a)bigfinish.com by 31 January

2007.

One winner will work with an editor to get their story to publishable

standard. They will receive *the* standard author's contract - and rates of

pay - for their story, which will be published in one of the Big Finish Short

Trips anthologies in 2007. Good luck!

Ian *Farrington and* Simon Guerrier

Big Finish *Productions*

To help get you thinking, we asked Doctor Who authors what they wish

they'd been told when they first started out:

"Don't agonise about what you're going to write. Have an idea. Write it.

It will be bad. Then you re-write it until it's good. Leave the worrying and

discussion about what they're going to write to non-writers."

Paul Cornell

"Write original, modern fiction. There are now thousands and thousands

of Doctor Who stories in different media. Do we really need another one

about the Doctor, Jo Grant and UNIT stopping the Master from taking over

Southern England?"

Joseph Lidster

"Ifyou don't enjoy spending time with your characters, neither will your

readers. And most writers don't enjoy writing - they like having written.

Don't expect the process itself to be anything other than a long hard

slog."

Rebecca Levene

"The two most important things you can do if you want to be a writer are:

read and write. Okay, so that sounds a bit trite. But the more you read, the

more you will understand how writing works - how *the* author uses

the

words on the page. And you'll learn from things other authors do well,

or that they do badly. You don't have to be hyper-critical or overly aware

of what you're reading. It'll happen, by a sort of literary osmosis. Just as

important - maybe more so - try to write something every day. Writing is

a craft as much as it's a talent or gift. Like a sport we have to work at it, to

train. The more you do, the more hours you put in, the better at it you get.

It doesn't matter if it's a story or a poem, keeping a journal (or blog!) or

even sending an email - it all helps."

Justin Richards

"Make your Doctor distinctive and recognisable. Every Doctor and

companion has their own way of speaking and moving - what words do

they use that other Doctors don't, and how do they use their hands? This of

course means re-watching lots of DVDs and videos. But honestly, whatever

anybody tells you, it's research."

Simon Guerrier

"Short stories don't have to be short novels. They can be about a small

event that has a big effect. How will one of your characters be different

at the end of your story? How have they changed, what have they

learned,

why, and how did they get there? The journey is usually more interesting

than the destination."

Peter Anghelides

"Any piece of writing can be improved by being made shorter. So if you're

writing 2,500 words, write 2,800 and then cut it down by getting rid of all

the bits that are not absolutely essential."

Jonathan Morris

"There's one technique I found crucial. It proved a major turning point for

me. When I first began writing, I would prepare for a project by making

notes. These would be theoretical, analytical notes where I would outline

the story for myself in an academic way - as if I was writing an essay. I

would consider the plot, the character, the effect I was trying to achieve.

And it took me some time to realise that this was not only not the best

approach, it was downright unhelpful. In fact, it was poison to the writing

process. This is because the analytical part of the mind is very different

from the creative. The sort of dry theorising that leads to a scholarly

analysis is the enemy of the imagination. These days, instead of writing

a long, detailed lifeless analysis of a character I will instead try to come

up with just one line of dialogue, but spoken vividly in that character's

voice. Once I've done that, I've got the character nailed down. Similarly,

instead of jotting down dry factual notes for a story I try and write them as

fragments of the story itself."

Andrew Cartmel

Competition feedback

The following general feedback was posted to the Outpost Gallifrey Doctor Who J o r u m on Tuesday, 19 June 2 0 0 7 .

The official BBC Doctor Who website has announced the winners of the Big

Finish short story competition.

With more than 1,000 entries, totalling more than 2,500,000 words,

there's simply no way we can offer individual feedback. However, I

promised to produce notes on *the* stories taken as a whole, so here we are.

There are already mailing lists set up for entrants to discuss their stories

and swap notes. I assume the organisers of these lists will post details in

the comments at the bottom of this post.

Anyway, first the disclaimers:

This isn't any kind of official statement from either Big Finish or the BBC.

It's my own thoughts, based on personal experience as a freelance writer.

I'm the one solely to blame.

What follows are some common things I saw in the more than i,coo

stories we received. They're not necessarily things that people got 'wrong',

but pointers that (I hope) might improve your next piece of writing.

These notes will not cure baldness or verrucas. Reading them won't

automatically get your Doctor Who stories published, nor will they

magically transform you into a professional writer. That takes practice

and perseverance (well, not *the* baldness and verrucas). Ifyou really want

to write, you've probably got more rejections to come - I'm still collecting

them, anyway.

These notes aren't rules or laws of physics. Others might disagree with any

or all of them. I probably ignore at least some of them in my own published

Doctor Who stories. Remember: these are the irrational prejudices of one

crabby old editor, too dim to see the shiny brilliance of your story.

You may feel having read the notes that your story did everything right. That

just means we preferred other stories over yours. I said we were dim.

Please don't send us a revised version of your story. Big Finish simply

doesn't have the time to read them. We're a small company and we've only

limited resources. I was employed as a freelancer to read the competition

entries, and now I'm off to do other things.

I don't know whether we'll run another competition like this one. It's been

a huge success, but also entailed a great deal of time and effort on our

part. The final decision isn't up to me, though, and if something like this

happens again, I think it is somebody else's turn to run it. If that's the case,

there'll be announcements - so keep an eye on www.bigfinish.com.

Lastly, some recommended reading. The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook

is a must for anyone serious about this sort of thing. I'd also recommend

William Goldman's Which Lie Did I Tell? and Robert McKee's Story. They're

both about writing screenplays but a lot of the advice applies generally.

(I was recommended Story in a letter rejecting an idea for a Doctor Who

novel.)

The Turkey City Lexicon - www.sfwa.org/writing/turkeycity.html - will help you spot and eliminate science-fiction cliches in your writing. The

BBC's writers room: www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom is full of useful advice, too. And at Outpost Gallifrey's Mythmakers forum: www.doctorwhoforum.

com/forumdisplay.php?f=2o you can compare your stories and swap

feedback with other competition entrants. Right then...

1. Classic Doctors...

There were only a few of these, but we had to disqualify stories with

the Ninth or Tenth Doctors, Daleks, Cybermen, Rose, Grace Holloway,

psychic paper, the Time War, etc. We don't have a licence for these things.

No matter how brilliant your story, if your story depended on any of these

there was no way you could win.

(We can't even include references to these things either - but in most cases

such mentionings could have been removed easily.)

2. ... Brand new adventures

Some stories depended too much on stuff from previous Doctor Who

stories. Some were even direct sequels. Often, without these recycled

continuity elements, there wouldn't have been any story.

3. The plotters

Some stories didn't have enough of a plot. Although a single conversation

or moment can give insight into character, we still need a story to drive it.

The Doctor and companion discuss their favourite movies: no. The Doctor

and companion discuss their favourite movies while on the run from some

robot monsters: yes!

Taking those last two points together, there was one plot we saw a lot of:

the Doctor sees some children playing. When he then sees their mother,

she's his granddaughter Susan. The end.

That's not so much a story as a scene. Much better if when he sees the

children, they're being attacked by a monster and he has to save them.

No, wait - even better! He charges in to save these poor children but they

don't need his help. These kids are brilliant, and the monster's fallen into

their trap. In fact, they have to save the Doctor. He's a bit shaken by all

this, so they take him home for tea. And that's when he sees who their mum is!

Same idea, but now it's a story. (What do you mean, "corny"?)

4. A family show

Like not using new series stuff, we're not able to publish stories which feature swearing, sex and/or gratuitous violence. You don't have to write specifically for children, but you shouldn't exclude them, either.

5. Did the Doctor change my life?

We needed to see people affected by their encounters with the Doctor. In some stories, events would have turned out more or less the same if the Doctor hadn't been involved. In other stories, the Doctor stopped a monster or brought down a dictator, but we didn't get an insight into how life was then different - usually because these stories weren't told from one person's point of view.

6. A strong central idea

A simple, clever premise helped to make *the* 25 stories on our shortlist stand out. They were each easily memorable as "the one with...". Some stories just felt a bit generic - the Doctor presses some buttons and so sees off a monster.

7. In the telling

With so many entries, it wasn't enough for your prose just to be okay. Your story had to engage us immediately, then keep us hooked right up to the end. That magic spell can be broken by clumsy grammar and

punctuation, by overly long sentences (especially when it's the very first

one!), by overwrought or cliched imagery, and by using too many adverbs

and adjectives. Some stories felt as if the authors were trying too hard to

impress us (and so failed to do so). Much better to keep things simple.

8. Oomph from the get-go

There's a difference between the suspense of waiting for something to

happen, and getting bored waiting for *anything to* happen. Some stories

felt like they were just setting up a single, climactic ending. One way out of

this: start with your brilliant climax, and then work upwards from there.

9. Lists

Descriptions shouldn't hold up the telling. We don't need to know every

detail of what someone's wearing or what objects are in a room. We just

need enough of a glimpse to know where we are.

10. 1 am the Doctor

In some stories it was difficult to tell which Doctor was involved.

Sometimes a Doctor would be physically described as, for example, the

Second Doctor, but would behave and sound like the Sixth. This was also

sometimes true of the companions.

11. Waving not drowning

Doctor Who doesn't have to be all sunshine and fluffy bunnies, but it is a fun

and lively show and *the* Doctor's a funny bloke. A sense of humour can also

give depth to a scary or downbeat story. The Doctor ruining people's lives

and driving them to suicide doesn't really match the feel of the series.

12. In the frame

Some stories used interesting and innovative framing devices which

helped to hook the reader, before the "real" story was told. Often, though,

these "real" stories weren't nearly so interesting.

13.Research

Some stories got their continuity wrong, or told stories that had been

done before in books or comics or audio plays. And most galling of all:

one or two stories were too like forthcoming stories... Annoyingly, there's

nothing you can do about that. I've done it many times myself.

Sorry.

Simon Guerrier

About the Authors

VIOLET ADDISON is a writer and a fool; she hopes one day to be able to

give it all up and concentrate full time on being a professional fool. She's

done many things, most of them unbelievable, many of them regrettable.

So she certainly doesn't want details of them appearing here. This is her

first professionally published work of fiction.

STEVEN ALEXANDER is 29 and works as a traffic engineer in London. He

has written numerous articles for the Doctor Who and cult TV fansite The

Vervoid. He likes reading, playing the guitar, swimming, karate and all the

other things everyone else gave up when they were 11-years-old. This is his

first professionally published work of fiction.

MIKE AMBERRY is a 32-year-old civil servant from Lancashire, who is

still trying to work out what to do with a degree in medieval studies. He

lives with his wife Michelle and a small brown dog called Farley, both

of whom he has successfully indoctrinated into the world of Doctor Who.

His chief hobby is procrastination, but when not doing that he likes

climbing mountains, writing poetry and spending quality time with his

computer. Mike is currently writing his second Doctor Who short story,

to be published in Short Trips: Indefinable *Magic* in 2009. Curiosity is his first professionally published work of fiction.

ARNOLD T BLUM BERG is the co-author of the Howe's Transcendental

Toybox series from Telos Publishing and the designer of many other Telos

publications, including The Target Book. He is also curator of the pop

culture exhibition Geppi's Entertainment Museum, and the author or co-

author of books on zombie and kaiju cinema, pop culture and comics. He

holds a doctorate in communications design and often requires people to

call him 'Doctor'. This is his first official contribution to the Doctor Who

universe and his first professionally published fiction - though he's now

also writing for Short Trips: Indefinable Magic. He still can't stop grinning.

ANNA BRATTON lives in Minneapolis and is currently trying to figure

out what to do with a BFA in Comic Art. This is her first professionally

published work of fiction.

JOHN CALLAGHAN is a songwriter and performer of pensive and

eccentric electronic songs. His gigs straddle cabaret, rock-style shows

and performance art and he has performed in London, Austria, Germany

and France. He's released three singles (two on the Warp label) and an

album (It Might Never Happen, Uncharted Audio 2007). His day job is as an

artists' model: he's posed as a trampolining gimp and as Michelangelo's

David (being covered in food by art gallery patrons). He is 173cm tall,

weighs 73kg, has a blood pressure of 110/6oHg and is currently writing for

Short *Trips: Indefinable Magic.* The Andrew Invasion is his first professionally published work of fiction.

DANN CHINN lives in London but prefers to inhabit varied shared fictional

universes. During his life to date, he's fitted in assorted adventures in the

fields of theatre, PR, architectural engineering, political opera, website

design and filing. In between these activities he's written music reviews

in the underground press - most notably for his own intermittently-active

webzine Misfit City - and sleeve-notes for music albums. In his spare time

he networks, and metaphorically glues talented people together in the

knowledge that the results might be spectacular (or at least brief, bright

and explosive). This is his first professionally published work of fiction.

MICHAEL COEN hails from Scotland. His short story Homework won

the competition for new writers run by Big Finish in 2007 and was first

published in Short Trips: Defining Patterns. Although a number of his

articles and papers have seen print, he is inordinately chuffed that his

first published fiction is part of Big Finish's Doctor Who range. Michael's

short story, Ivory, has been published in the Pantechnicon Book of Lies, he is

currently working on a novel for younger readers and has released several

TV scripts into the wild, hoping they find a home.

STEPHEN DUNN lives in Yorkshire and works for a mental health charity.

He was born in 1966 and saw England win the World cup on the television,

balanced on his mother's knee. He is educating his wife - Lisa - in the

joys of Doctor Who with help from his nephews - Adam and Dominic. He

is surprised and pleased to find his work published in this book, as his

last piece of fiction was for the school magazine when he was 14. He is

now writing for Short Trips: Indefinable Magic. Potential is Stephen's first

professionally published work of fiction.

RICHARD GOFF is 41 years-old, married with two children and lives in

South Croydon. When not campaigning for the return of The Sarah Jane

Adventures to their rightful location in the universe, he's the Content

Manager for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. He

also writes as Quark for sci-fi satire site www.orionbag.com and as Johnny Pundit on football site www.the-onion-bag.com - but this is his first professionally published work of fiction.

SIMON GUERRIER (EDITOR) is the editor of two previous Short

Trips

anthologies. He's *the* author of two original BBC Doctor Who novels - The

Time Travellers, featuring *the* First Doctor, and The Pirate Loop, featuring the Tenth Doctor - and of ten audio plays for Big Finish.

MATTHEW JAMES, in between am-dram and working for the government,

has written many things, including novels and plays for television

and radio. Unfortunately, all of them were returned to him. But some

constructive comments spurred him on and he turned his hand to the *New*

Adventures range and got close - so close he bought a new printer. Now, 20

years later, his short story Taking the Cure has justified that purchase and

there is no doubt he will continue writing in the hope of one day justifying

a Porsche. At least he has the wild imagination a writer needs. Matthew is

currently writing for Short Trips: Indefinable Magic. Taking the Cure is his first

professionally published work of fiction.

TIM LAMBERT has at various times been a physicist, pharmaceutical

technician, shoe salesman, web developer and paid to set things on fire.

Having narrowly escaped being born in Belgium, he began an unhealthy

fixation with Doctor Who somewhere in the murk of his early childhood.

This is his first professionally published work of fiction.

JR LOFLIN prefers rainy days to sunny ones, claiming that they're prettier

and they smell better. His interests include genre series, sitcoms, songs

in languages he doesn't understand and good old-fashioned superhero

comics like *the* ones they made when he was a boy. This is his first

professionally published work of fiction, and since Doctor Who is what

made him want to be a writer in the first place, he couldn't be happier.

NICK MAY lives in a state of arrested development in Colchester with

his partner Melanie and an ever-growing 'family' of trainers. Though

only 31, his earliest memories of the show include watching the very first

episode on TV. Since leaving university, he has been a college lecturer, debt

counsellor and inveterate barfly. Many people are surprised at the first two.

Nick is a regular contributor to the online fanzine Shockeye's Kitchen and has

one more wisdom tooth than most people. This is his first professionally

published work.

JAMES C McFETRIDGE lives in Belfast where he works in the theatre as a

lighting designer and production manager. He was the lighting designer

on the original production of Stones In His Pockets, and re-lit the show in the

West End and on Broadway. He has written a number of novels and short

stories, but this is his first professionally published work of fiction.

MICHAEL MONTOURE works as a web developer in Seattle, Washington,

which distracts him far too much from writing horror and science fiction.

His first encounter with the Doctor was in a fan-made amateur film, which

taught him at the impressionable age of 13 that Doctor Who wasn't just

something you watched - it was something you could make. He has made

every attempt to remain at an impressionable age ever since. This is his

first professionally published work of fiction.

SIMON MOORE recently left the job that inspired his story and returned

home to Tyneside. His previous writings include a short play for the

Customs House Theatre, South Shields, and an inhuman number of press

releases. This is his first professionally published work of fiction.

LM MYLES lives in a remote part of Scotland where there are occasional

sightings of wild haggis roaming the glens. Once upon a time she

watched a show called Doctor Who and thought it was great, especially that

Troughton fellow. She is currently drinking a nice cup of tea. This is her

first professionally published work of fiction.

EINAR OLGEIRSSON is a packaging technologist from Grimsby and at

29-years-old is still haunted by memories of the Kandyman and his own

sickly-sweet brand of death. It has long been an ambition of his to find

fame, if not fortune, as a writer, but he never expected it to occur on the

pages of a *Doctor* Who short-story anthology. When he's not dreaming

up situations for the Doctor, he occupies himself with writing his debut

novel. Einar has since written Henry for the Pantechnicon Book of Lies, but this

is his first professionally published work of fiction.

BERNARD OTOOLE hails from Lancashire. He remembers the first book

he ever read being the novelisation of The Deadly Assassin. Every week

from then on, his pocket money was usually spent on another Doctor Who

adventure. These days he writes scripts for television and radio... and maybe

one day might even manage to sell one of them. In July 2008, Bernard was

one of eight winners of *the* BBC Writersroom Sharps competition. He is

father to little Jessica and enjoys it immensely. But what he wouldn't give

for a full night's sleep. This is his first professionally published work of

fiction... but let's hope it isn't *the* last.

ANDREW K PURVIS has, over the last ten years, risen to *the* very lower-

middle of the Australian public service, waiting for his chance to strike.

This is the first time anyone has taken him seriously and is his first

professionally published work of fiction.

MICHAEL REES lives in Cardiff, the new home of Doctor Who, where every

day he walks past the Magpie Television Store and Albion Hospital on the

way to his office job. A lifelong fan of Doctor Who, this story completes his

dream of contributing to the rich tapestry of the legendary time traveller.

His most exciting previous Doctor Who related moment was meeting Colin

Baker at a convention. The Doctor has nurtured in Michael a love of all

things science fiction, history and jelly babies and he is currently writing a

new Doctor Who story for Short Trips: Indefinable Magic. Swamp of Horrors is his

first professionally published work of fiction.

HARK SMITH is a journalist and editor. He often writes about Doctor Who

and has interviewed many of its stars including Tom Baker, David Tennant

and Elisabeth Sladen. His story *Perce* was a winner of the SFX/ Gollancz

short-story competition and was published in 2007. My Life So *Far* was

published in the *Pantechnicon Book of Lies* in 2008.

CHRIS WING is 30 and works in Performance Management in Oxford.

He lives with his wife, Hayley, who endures Chris' love for Doctor

Who,

alongside resident incarcerated wild mouse, Joey and new baby Lyra. He

is an amateur psychologist and evolutionary biologist (as in completely

unqualified) and cannot read in front of *the* television. When he's not

doing all things *Doctor* Who, he likes to relax in front of his PC and attempt

to knock together the next best-selling novel - either that or make a mean

chilli con carne. This is his first professionally published work of fiction.

CALEB WOODBRIDGE is from the Death Zone on Gallifrey - sorry, North

Wales - and now lives in Cardiff. While a student, he wrote extensively for

Cardiff University's student media and was the student paper's unofficial

Doctor Who correspondent He now both dreads and relishes the challenge

of trying to make it as a Proper Writer, and is currently writing for Short

Trips: Indefinable Magic. The Shopping Trolleys of Doom is his first professionally

published work of fiction.